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**The production of rights in disasters in
Uttar Pradesh, India:
implications for theory and practice**

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PhD

2011

**The production of rights in disasters in
Uttar Pradesh, India:
implications for theory and practice**

Supriya Akerkar

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requirements of the University of Northumbria
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Abstract

Despite a shift in the practice of international NGOs to a rights-based approach to disasters there is a dearth of substantial theoretical reflections on this linkage within academia. Given this knowledge gap, this research studies the linkages between disaster and rights using the case study of Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh, India.

The main contribution that this thesis makes to new knowledge is that of deepening the understanding of the way in which rights are produced in disasters. The thesis proposes a theoretical framework to enable such a critical assessment. The main assertion of the theoretical framework is that the social vulnerability approach to disasters can reduce vulnerability and promote social resilience only through a critical assessment of rights that includes subaltern constructs of rights and moral economy structures, their critique or collusion with the governmental framing and institutionalization of rights. The thesis grounds this claim made in the theoretical framework through its empirical chapters. The thesis has four empirical chapters; the first inquires into the colonial history of modern disaster rights; the second interrogates disaster rights in post-colonial India; the third analyses the implications of a subaltern perspective of rights for disaster risk reduction strategy; and the fourth analyses social change processes through the contestation of rights, partly attributed to the disaster. The concluding chapter of the thesis makes recommendations for a rights based social vulnerability analysis and for action in disasters in Uttar Pradesh, India. These recommendations can act as new directions for rights based disaster risk reduction and recovery work.

The thesis uses an interdisciplinary approach to investigate this subject area. In particular, it uses disaster theory, human rights and political theory, subaltern theory and feminist theory. The thesis uses a hermeneutic approach as its dominant research methodology, and ethnographic research methods. It also makes a limited use of archival data and quantitative survey methods.

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Author's declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the School Ethics Committee.

Name: Supriya Akerkar

Signature:

Date: 25th June 2011

Chapter 1

Introduction

This chapter introduces the subject matter of this thesis, namely the relationship between rights and disasters and outlines the knowledge contribution this thesis makes to disaster theory and practice. It further introduces the research context, the location and the socio-economic context of the researched site.

The chosen subject matter of this PhD research is a result of my reflections on my field experience of engaging with earthquake, tsunami, droughts, floods and cyclone effects whilst working with the international development Agency ‘Action Aid International’ in these different disaster contexts in India, Asia and Africa. Reflections on this experience suggested that ‘rights’ impacted the disaster outcomes in fundamental ways and this research is thus also a personal journey in exploring these intimate connections. My other pasts, a social activist who has worked with the rights of marginalised sections in India (namely the adivasis or indigenous people in Maharashtra, whilst working with a mass organisation Kashtakari Sanghatana; and a researcher who has worked with the Indian NGO Centre for Science and Environment, exploring the rights of marginalised sections and environmental policies) have only added to this belief that ‘rights’ mediate social, environmental and disaster impacts in fundamental ways. This past has contributed to the choice of the research topic taken for my PhD thesis enquiry.

1.1 Policy shifts in disaster practice: from needs based to rights based approaches

The idea of *rights as claims* in legal parlance is associated with negative as well as positive freedoms where positive freedoms denote a person’s claim to be positively assisted to achieve a socially valued goal, whilst negative freedoms denote a person’s claim not be interfered with or impeded from doing or achieving what he or she wishes to pursue. The negative freedoms and rights are typically associated with the civil and political rights, whilst positive freedoms and rights with social, economic and cultural rights. In the context of disasters, they take different forms; for example, the right to be not discriminated can be considered as a political right and to be assisted positively as per the need to be a socio-economic right. This right of assistance in disasters has its own historical trajectory, influenced by the work of humanitarian actors and the general discourse on development and law. Eminent social theorists such as Nancy Fraser have favoured the translation of

socially “justified needs claims into social rights” as she is critical of “forms of paternalism that arise when needs claims are divorced from rights claims” (Fraser, 1989 p183). Thus the needs in disaster contexts, from the perspective of Fraser need to be advocated as rights.

Globally, disaster response work has traditionally been associated with charity work driven by humanitarian concerns and imperatives, responding to basic needs of people after disasters. This humanitarian work has been carried out in two fields: that of natural disasters, that is disasters following an extreme event such as floods, drought, cyclone, typhoon, volcanoes, earthquake etc; and disasters arising out of human conflict; ethnic or political strife, failure of governance, or armed conflict. The work of the International Committee for Red Cross (ICRC), one of the oldest international organisations responding to disasters has been informed by a humanitarian ethic over years. This humanitarian work of the Red Cross stipulates that humanitarian actors in all circumstances, adhere to certain principles: namely neutrality, impartiality, and responding as per the need (Mackintosh, 2000). Further, to what extent these humanitarian principles ought to align itself with human rights standards has been a question of open debate amongst the humanitarian players, with different organisations interpreting the humanitarian and human rights mandate differently. One of the contested issues has been: the question of whether the principle of neutrality or impartiality is violated if humanitarian organisations and actors take up political positions as a result of a human rights based approach (Slim, 2002).

Over the years, these debates have led to some international organisations making a shift from a needs based and service delivery approach to rights based approach in disaster response work with these organisations equating needs based response from a human rights perspective as a right to basic needs after disaster, thus aligning with approaches as endorsed by Nancy Fraser. A multi-NGO initiative such as the Sphere project has now proclaimed that survivors have a “right to assistance” (Sphere Project, 2004 p. 5). The humanitarian charter outlined in Sphere manual commits humanitarian agencies to minimum defined standards of services for people affected by calamity or armed conflict, in relation to needs for water, sanitation, nutrition, food, shelter to “satisfy their basic right to life with dignity”(Sphere Project, 2004 p. 19). This use of ‘rights’ language in Sphere project itself is a result of the reflective journey undertaken by the agencies involved in the development of sphere standards. For example, responding to the criticism that Sphere standards were technical in nature, when first adopted in 1999; the revised edition of the

Sphere project in 2004 consciously builds rights based language (Darcy, 2004; Walker & Purdin, 2004). The humanitarian charter and the minimum sphere standards are today regarded as benchmarks for accountability in humanitarian assistance efforts for humanitarian agencies.

Some of the international non-government organisations which have incorporated rights based approaches into their disaster responses are Action Aid International, amongst others. Globally, governments and non government organisations have come together under the UNISDR initiative to adopt the Hyogo Framework for Action (2005) which connects long term development goals and strategies with disaster risk reduction and resilience building (UNISDR, 2005). Such shift through the Hyogo Framework for Action has led organisations such as Action Aid international (2006) to suggest “risk reduction lies at the interface between humanitarian response to disasters and development” (Action Aid International, 2006 p. 2). The shift in the international discourse through the Hyogo framework for Action which seeks to connect risk reduction and disaster response strategies with development also creates new challenges for principles of ‘neutrality’. As Escobar’s work (1995) has suggested, development is a discursive strategy and has political effects, which suggests that disaster response, recovery and risk reduction work cannot but be political in nature when linked with development goals (Escobar, 1995).

1.2 Theorising the rights based approach in disasters: a knowledge gap?

Despite this shift in the practice of international NGOs to a rights-based approach to disasters there is a dearth of substantial theoretical reflections on this linkage within academia. An exception to this is the theorisation around famine following Amartya Sen’s theory which linked entitlements with famine prevention (Sen, 1983). Using comparisons between India and China, Sen argued that famine was prevented in India after its independence due to a presence of democratic governance, whilst China suffered massive deaths in the famine of 1958-61. Sen further argued using India as a case study that famine in colonial India was a result of the failure of entitlement to food rather than that of food scarcity.

Sen’s entitlement approach to famine provides useful insights for vulnerability reduction in disasters as most disasters are followed by scarcities of resources including food in India and many other countries. However, this link has not been adequately explored in the

context of other forms of disasters: such as floods, earthquakes, cyclones, tsunamis and other natural disasters. A discussion in the direction of vulnerability reduction was made by Blaikie et al 1994 and Wisner et al 2004 which brought the issue of entitlements implicitly to disaster discourse when they introduced the importance of “social protection” to livelihood risk and vulnerability reduction strategies (Blaikie *et al.*, 1994; Wisner *et al.*, 2004). This perspective of Blaikie et al 1994 and Wisner et al 2004 follows a social vulnerability approach and shares common elements with other theoretical perspectives as advocated by feminists (Enarson & Morrow, 1997; Enarson & Fordham, 2001; Fordham, 2003; Enarson & Meyreles, 2004) (Ariyabandhu & Wicremasinghe, 2003; Fordham, 2004) and those who use political ecology perspective (Oliver-Smith, 1999). All these perspectives also use social vulnerability as the key analytical concept to understand differential disaster impacts and their implication for disaster risk reduction and recovery strategies. This social vulnerability approach is discussed in detail in the theoretical framework of this thesis, for the advocacy it makes for the analyses of social inequities in disasters in order to promote public policies that maximize social resilience to disasters. Collins in particular emphasises the link between rights and resilience when he argues that “Rights, responsibilities and governance are core aspects of the disaster and development nexus” (Collins, 2009 p. 250)

The social protection approach by Wisner et al 2004 includes formal governance as well as informal mechanisms ranging from legal enforcement of, for example, building codes or the building of embankments to community coping mechanisms such as self help. Similarly, Twigg (2007) includes the presence of a formal safety net, social protection systems, informal mutual assistance in community based systems, and social networks as markers of a disaster resilient community and an enabling environment to nurture such resilience (Twigg, August 2007). Twigg (2007) also links community resilience with the presence of good governance, enabling legislations, equitable assistance rights and a legally aware community. Further, from a rights perspective, the strategy of formal social protection resonates with the protection and promotion of social, economic and cultural rights of the citizens which propose that the state has a positive duty to respond to the welfare and recovery needs of its citizens after disasters.

Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004; 2007) make this connection when they link reduction in structural vulnerability to risks (and disasters) with the extent to which social protection strategies and frameworks are in place as entitlements

or within a framework of citizenship rights. In 2007, a special Institute of Development Studies (IDS) bulletin discussed the question of social protection and risk/vulnerability reduction. Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler assert that:

“Transformative social protection’ extends beyond safety nets and welfare handouts, towards supporting citizens to claim social protection from the state as a basic right” (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2007 p. 3)

They further add

“The ultimate goal, surely, should be nationally owned social protection policies, underpinned by a ‘social contract’ between the state and its citizens, where governments acknowledge that social protection is a right for which they are the duty-bearers, and citizens mobilise to demand that this right is effectively delivered to them”. (ibid, p. 7)

There is, as seen from the above discussion and recent theorisations, an increased emphasis on human rights, citizenship rights and substantive underpinnings of these rights through social protection and entitlement related policies and practices which can reduce social vulnerabilities and risks to disasters. However, such rights based approaches have been criticised: for example, by Aoo et al (2007) who in their response to Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler argue that such an approach is top down as it imposes human rights standards in social protection on poor people and for having “patronizing” overtones (Aoo *et al.*, 2007 p. 29). Further, the positive assessment of social protection as citizenship rights and human rights by the above theorisations in enabling recovery and disaster risk reduction need to be evaluated further in the context of India given that there is a cautious evaluation of the emancipatory potential of human rights as citizenship rights within India’s intelligentsia (Chatterjee, 2004; Menon, 2004).

India has a progressive constitution which affirms fundamental rights of the citizens and has several progressive laws; however, large sections of the masses continue to be excluded from enjoying them in full. Subaltern scholar critics such as Partha Chatterjee argue that although the masses in India share a political relationship with the state, they do not enjoy citizenship rights as envisaged in a constitutional sense. This relationship is better described through the politics of governance of masses rather than the actualization of their substantive citizenship rights: although Chatterjee grants that the presences of state institutions have transformed some of the traditional authority structures and practices. Chatterjee observes:

“Most of the inhabitants of India are only tenuously, and even then ambiguously and contextually, rights-bearing citizens in the sense imagined by the constitution ... But it is not as though they are outside the reach of the state or even excluded from the domain of politics. As populations within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, they have to be both looked after and controlled by various governmental agencies. These activities bring these populations into a certain *political* relationship with the state” (Chatterjee, 2004 p. 38).

Other critics of citizenship and human rights discourse include those like Chandoke who argue that in a country like India, civil and political rights which uphold freedom are meaningless as there is no corresponding right to basic needs, due to which the civil and political rights of freedom operate only at “*formal*” and at “*unsubstantial*” levels (Chandoke, 2003 p. 86). Likewise Nivedita Menon (2004) argues that human rights in India have a limited emancipatory potential by showing, for example, how a women’s rights for example, right to abortion is used to kill female foetuses due to traditional male bias amongst certain populations (Menon, 2004) .

This creates an interesting conceptual paradox: on one hand, in India, several ‘citizens’ do not enjoy substantive citizenship rights, despite a progressive constitution which affirms the universal citizenship rights of all people; on the other, their social vulnerability can only be decreased by and through affirming citizenship and human rights, as suggested by social theorists advocating strategies of vulnerability reduction. Thus the conceptual apparatus which links rights, vulnerability and risk reduction to disasters depends on a circular argument and is not able to provide a substantive critique of why human rights and citizenship rights have not delivered on disaster recovery and risk reduction.

This thesis argues that the above critique of rights as well as its conceptual paradox can be unravelled by deepening and grounding our understanding of *how rights are produced in disasters*. The thesis identifies this as the main knowledge gap and seeks to fill it by taking the following insight by Kabeer as its starting point for analysis:

“The state, in its various manifestations, is clearly central in determining which needs and priorities are given the status of rights and in their operationalisation. However, beyond the state, a wider range of institutions, including those of the market and civil society, also contribute to the process through their recognition and respect for these rights”(Kabeer, 2002 p. 21) .

In other words, Kabeer suggests that state as well as non-state actors determine the way rights are produced. In this thesis, I use the notion of ‘subaltern’ agency as a critical non-state actor which influences rights. The idea of ‘subaltern’ is discussed in my theoretical framework, however, briefly speaking; the notion will be defined as the voice of the excluded and socially marginalised persons in a given social location. Further I also use in this thesis, moral economy as an important domain which affects the operationalization of rights, given that notions of ‘morality’ are a part of the normative dimensions of social worlds.

This thesis therefore poses the following research sub-questions:

- a) What is the effect of statist notions of rights or human rights discourses on disaster impacts, coping, recovery and risk reduction?
- b) What is the effect of the subaltern construction of rights and obligations and/or moral economy on disaster impacts, coping, recovery and risk reduction?
- c) What is the intersecting effect of the statist notions of rights or human rights discourses, moral economy, and the subaltern construction or critique of these rights on disaster impacts, coping, recovery and risk reduction?

It is suggested that an understanding of these sub-questions can help unravel the structural limitations that affect how rights are produced.

To further advance an analysis of how rights are produced, this thesis develops a theoretical framework that outlines and discusses the structural limitations as well as the strength of human rights discourse in disasters. In doing so it further provides an epistemological justification for the way in which this enquiry can be ethically constructed, stressing the importance of including notions of rights as used by subaltern and moral economy structures in critical ways. It shows how answering the above sub-questions can unravel the conceptual paradox stated above and help develop newer analytical conclusions to further rights based humanitarian action in disasters.

The thesis explores these research questions through the case study of India and the villages in district Bahraich in Uttar Pradesh. India, the world’s largest democracy with the formidable plethora of rights enshrined in its constitution and its colonial history, forms a rich backdrop to undertake such an enquiry. It is argued that such an enquiry can provide

useful insights for understanding linkages between rights and disasters in other contexts too and may have relevance for the global South.

1.3 Contribution to new knowledge

In the light of the above discussions, the main contribution of this thesis to new knowledge will be that of deepening the understanding of the way in which rights are produced in disasters using the case study of Uttar Pradesh, India. The thesis proposes a theoretical framework to enable such a critical assessment with its empirical chapters grounding the claims made in the theoretical framework. The main assertion of the theoretical framework is that the social vulnerability approach can reduce vulnerability and promote social resilience only through a critical assessment of rights that includes subaltern constructs of rights and moral economy structures, their critique or collusion with the governmental framing and institutionalization of rights through state based practices. The thesis grounds such a critical assessment of rights through its empirical chapters with the concluding chapter recommending new directions for rights based disaster risk reduction and recovery work.

1.4 Structure of the thesis and its approach to knowledge generation

This thesis engages with relevant literature from disaster theory, human rights and political theory, subaltern theory and feminist theory in its theoretical framework and the empirical chapters. In her overview of disaster studies, Tierney (2007) notes that disaster sociology has not adequately enriched itself as it has not borrowed sufficiently from insights from other social theories. Tierney (2007) notes that disaster theory

“must integrate the study of disasters with core sociological concerns, such as social inequality, societal diversity, and social change ... they must locate the study of disasters within broader theoretical frameworks, including in particular those concerned with risk, organizations and institutions, and society-environment interactions” (Tierney, 2007 pp. 520-521).

This thesis has sought to follow Tierney’s suggestions and followed an interdisciplinary approach to knowledge generation in disaster. Further, the thesis draws mainly from the qualitative data and has discussions embedded in every chapter. Thus this brings in vital discussion points from empirical chapters into the conclusion chapter. The conclusion chapter describes key recommendations for rights based disaster response and risk reduction work, which form the new knowledge contribution of this thesis.

The thesis is organised into eight chapters as follows:

Introduction Chapter 1

This chapter introduces the research question being studied and the main knowledge contribution that the thesis claims to make. It also introduces the broad context of debates within which the research questions are embedded.

Theoretical Framework Chapter 2

This chapter engages in a critical discussion of the literature on disaster theory, human rights and political theory, subaltern theory, feminist theory and develops a theoretical framework to analyse the research questions.

Methodology Chapter 3

This chapter discusses the main methodology and the research methods used to collect and analyse the data. In particular, it discusses the double hermeneutic perspective, and the ethnographic research methods used such as narratives, unstructured interviews, participant observation, and a limited use of archival data and quantitative survey methods.

Empirical Chapter 4: Rights and Governmentality: Famine Responses in Colonial India

This Chapter uses archival data to study the colonial state's discourse and response to famines in India, the nature of rights discourse invoked through this response which I call "governmentality of rights" and its critique by the nationalists, subaltern politics and Gandhi.

Empirical Chapter 5: In Heterogeneous Times: Disaster Response in Post-colonial India

This Chapter discusses how the policies of the post-colonial Indian state constitute continuity as well as change. It critically evaluates the post colonial response from a rights perspective. From the perspective of rights, the chapter also shows how local political economy, moral economy structures and subaltern politics interact with state entitlements to contribute to a production of rights that affect coping with disasters.

Empirical Chapter 6: Disasters, Social Natures and the Subaltern

The chapter engages with the governmental/technocratic as well as subaltern constructions of nature and disasters which ascribe notions of rights and responsibilities to society and nature. Further, these constructions also show that disasters are treated as discursive practices and used to legitimize or question certain social claims. The notion of discursive practices emphasise that meaning of the 'words' - the narratives by my respondents about

‘disaster’ – lies in its contextual use, and the effect it has on the social reality. These constructions have an implication for the disaster risk reduction strategies.

Empirical Chapter 7: Disasters, Social Change and the Politics for Rights

By tracing the parameters through which social identities are formed and asserted in the context of disaster, this chapter analyses the production of identity based rights in the social terrain constituting a subaltern politics *for* rights. In particular this chapter studies the assertion or the non- assertion of the identity based equality rights as an indicator of social change, given the historical relation of dominance and subordination based on castes and gender in India.

Conclusions Chapter 8

This Chapter summarises the substance of discussions in all the earlier chapters to outline the main recommendations of this thesis and justifies its claim to new knowledge creation. In the next section, I introduce the villages from Bahraich district, India, where the field work for this study was undertaken.

1.5 Introduction to the field area

This PhD study was carried out in the villages of District Bahraich, Fakharpur block in Uttar Pradesh and is closely aligned with the MICRODIS² project supported by the EU. The research context for this thesis, namely the villages in Bahraich was chosen by Delhi University (DU), one of the MICRODIS partners in India, based on the extent of floods in the year 2007 in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India. Bahraich district was one of the worst flooded districts in Uttar Pradesh in 2007. The villages chosen were flooded and eroded by the River Ghagra, one of the major Himalayan rivers in the region. Thus Ghagra flows through certain eroded parts of researched villages as of today.

The MICRODIS survey was carried out in four flooded villages of Fakharpur block, district Bahraich. The four flooded villages selected for the study were Laxmanpur, Mithapur, Ghagrapur and Baundi³. Surveys were carried out in these villages from 1-15th October 2008 by a MICRODIS team. Further, qualitative field work too was carried out by the team during this 15 day period, which included focus group discussions (FGDs) with

² MICRODIS is an Integrated Project funded under the EU Sixth Framework Programme – Thematic Priority 6.3 Global Change and Ecosystems (Contract number GOCE-CT-2007-036877. (See Appendix 7)

³ Except for Baundi, all the other names given to the villages are fictitious. This has been done to protect the identity of the village and the villagers involved in my PhD study. Baundi on the other hand due to its unique history which has been of relevance to this thesis and therefore discussed in the empirical chapters retains its original name.

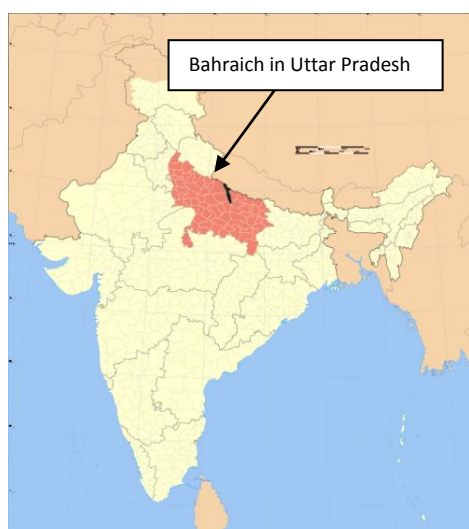
groups of men and women from the four flooded villages and the village Pradhans. I contributed and participated in the survey and FGDs as a member of the MICRODIS team.

My own PhD research tools included much extensive field work in the selected researched site, beyond the main MICRODIS survey and qualitative work carried out during 1-15th October 2008. I chose the village Ghagrapur, one of the MICRODIS flooded village sites to carry out in-depth fieldwork using ethnographic research methods to explore the research questions I had set for my PhD thesis and stayed in this village continuously from August – December 2008. In the following sections I give contextual information about my field site.

1.6 Bahraich district and the researched villages:

The district name Bahraich has been associated with two different meanings. One ancient legend suggests that the name is derived from the place being the abode of “Brahma, the creator” according to Hindu mythology; Brahma had called a number of rishis (saints) to establish his worship in this place. As a result, this place was named as “Brahmaich”, with the current name being derived from this earlier name. Another legend suggests that the name is derived after the older residents and inhabitants of the place called “Bhars”, now considered extinct from the district (Pande, 1988 p. 1)

Figure 1: Location of District Bahraich



Source: Government of India⁴

⁴ Downloaded from <http://india.gov.in/outerwin.php?id=http://behraich.nic.in> on 14th December 2010

Box 1 Bahraich: key socio-economic indicators

Bahraich district is one of the poorest districts in Uttar Pradesh and India as seen from its key socio-economic indicators. It also has a high scheduled caste (SC) or Harijan population, namely a social group earlier known as untouchables and lowest in the caste hierarchy. The total scheduled caste population in Uttar Pradesh is 21.1 percent, while that in Bahraich district is 14.4 percent. The scheduled caste population in the four flooded researched villages was 13.26 percent. In the village Ghagrapur, SC population was found to be 19.07 percent of the total village population. The villages including Ghagrapur are predominantly Hindu with a few Muslim families residing in it. Further, the researched area shows gender based disparities on various indicators given below.

Female/Male Sex Ratio: The female to male sex ratio for Bahraich district is skewed; 868/1000 as against the all UP average of 898/1000. In the four flooded researched villages, the female to male sex ratio is 872/1000 comparable to the rest of the district.

Literacy: The literacy rate shows the percentage of population literate in a particular segment. The literacy rate for UP shows a female literacy rate at 42.2 percent and male literacy rate at 56.3 percent. In Bahraich, the female literacy rate is at 22.8 percent and male at 45.6 percent. The literacy rate in the four flooded villages shows a female literacy rate at 12.5 percent and a male literacy rate of 30.3 percent only. In Ghagrapur, the female literacy rate is 12.7 percent while male literacy rate is 36.5 percent.

(See Table: 1)

Occupation: In Uttar Pradesh, cultivators constitute 47 percent of the total workforce. Further, 47.5 percent are male cultivators, while 43.1 percent are female cultivators, the rest being involved in other occupations. In Bahraich, 60.9 percent are cultivators; 61.8 percent are males, 52.1 percent are females. In the four flooded researched villages, 52.25 percent were cultivators, with male at 61.87 percent and females at 25.8 percent. In Ghagrapur, 73.5 percent were cultivators, with 84.1 percent being males, and 52.8 percent being females. (See Table 2)

In UP, agricultural labourers constitute 15.1 percent of the total workforce; with 14 percent males and 22.8 percent females. In Bahraich, 20.8 percent are mainly agriculture labourers, with 19.4 percent males and 33.5 percent females. In the four flooded researched villages, 43.42 percent were agricultural labourers of the total workforce with 33.2 percent males, and 71.02 percent females. In Ghagrapur, of the total workforce 24.1 percent were agricultural labourers; with 13.2 percent males and 45.3 percent females. In other words, women constitute a bulk of agricultural labour force in the district and the researched villages. (See Table 2)

Source: Census of India, 2001

Table 1: Literacy rate in the researched area

Literacy rate	Uttar Pradesh	Bahraich district	Four researched villages	Ghagrapur
Total male literacy rate (literate males as a percentage of male population)	56.3	45.6	30.3	36.5
Total female literacy rate (literate females as a percentage of female population)	42.2	22.8	12.5	12.7

Source: Census of India 2001

Table 2: Main Occupation followed in the researched area

S.no	Main Occupation	Uttar Pradesh	Bahraich district	Four researched villages	Ghagrapur
1	Cultivators (as % of total work force)	47	60.9	52.25	73.5
2	Male cultivators (as % of total male work force)	47.5	61.8	61.87	84.1
3	Female cultivators (as % of total female work force)	43.1	52.1	25.8	52.8
4	Agricultural labourers (as % of total work force)	15.1	20.8	43.42	24.1
5	Male agricultural labourers (as % of total male work force)	14	19.4	33.2	13.2
6	Female agricultural labourers (as % of total female work force)	22.8	33.5	71.02	45.3

Source: Census of India 2001

In terms of their social composition, the researched villages were predominantly Hindu with varied caste compositions; but can be classified broadly between three groups. They are as follows: Firstly, the brahman-thakurs which traditionally form the upper castes or the dominant castes and classified as the general castes by the government, were originally a landed class, but several of whom have now lost the bulk of their lands due to erosion by the River Ghagra; Secondly, the intermediate castes predominantly consisting of gudiya or kevaths, luniyas, and also ahirs, kurmis, and classified as the Other Backward Classes (OBC) by the Government. These intermediate castes have traditionally been engaged in different occupations such as ahirs doing pastoral work; gudiyas or kevaths engaged in fishing, rowing of boats, or doing housework at richer people's households; kurmis and luniyas involved in agricultural work; most of whom now either being rendered landless or marginal farmers due to erosion; Thirdly, the lowest in the caste hierarchy and traditionally doing all the menial work in the village; the former untouchable castes or the "outcaste", namely phasis and chamars, classified as Scheduled Castes (SC) by the government. The scheduled castes are also locally popularly known as *harijans* – meaning children of god: a word first coined for this group by Gandhi so as to take away the social stigma attached to

their caste names and traditional work⁵. The dominant castes refers to those belonging to the other backward classes and scheduled castes, known collectively as ‘suds’⁶. In my analysis, I will be referring to the specific caste category of my respondents in my analysis as caste has emerged as an important category which influences rights and entitlements in the villages. The few Muslims households in the villages also practiced some sort of social hierarchy between themselves based on the traditional occupations of the households. All the Muslim households in the village were also designated as ‘other backward classes’ given their traditional artisan based occupations such as weaving. All the households observed rules of taboos in cooked food exchange⁷ between them based on religion, caste and perceived social hierarchy. Thus there were taboos around sharing of cooked food and water among different castes as well as between all Hindus and Muslims. Further, marriages were endogamous and took place mainly within the caste and sub-caste groups and religion, each observing its own custom with thakurs following the practice of hypergamy, which is marrying their daughters in the sub-caste higher to them.

1.7 The River Ghagra: floods and erosion

The context of this thesis is the flooding of and erosion by the river Ghagra. In this section, I give contextual information about the River Ghagra: one of the major Himalayan river of India, running through its various states. Ghagra is continuously fed by the melting of the snow during summer and spring, and rains during monsoon. Ghagra⁸ is known for her meandering and the way she bends alternately from one side to another. Known by the name of Karnali in Nepal, she originates at a source close to Lake Manasorovar at 4800 meters. The river enters Nepal and continues with its serpentine route and enters the plains of Nepal. After entering the plains of Nepal it is divided into two main tributaries – Kauriala and Girwa. The Kauriala and Girwa meet again in Bahraich district, Uttar Pradesh ahead of the Girija barrage at Kailashpuri after which it flows through Bahraich under the name of Ghagra. River Ghagra continues its journey through Ayodhya where it is known

⁵ In this thesis, I will be referring to this group of former untouchables, when referred to as a whole, as either *harijans*, or as scheduled castes. This is because, people from this caste group in my researched villages referred to themselves by these names. Although these groups are often referred to as “*dalits*”, meaning oppressed, by the activists and intellectuals across India, people from my researched villages did not identify themselves by this reference, hence the use of scheduled castes or ‘*harijans*’. I also describe the group as ‘former untouchables’ as the practice of untouchability is legally banned and as such they are in legal parlance ‘former untouchables’ although social discrimination continues in practice.

⁶ *Suds* refer to ‘*shudra*’ or ‘lower’ castes, and are colloquially referred to as ‘*sud*’ in this area.

⁷ Raw items such as paddy can be exchanged between persons of different castes.

⁸ I will be using a feminine gender for the river Ghagra as it is used so by the residents of my researched villages. However, more generally many rivers in India are traditionally called by their feminine gender, while the sea where all river water ultimately goes to is denoted by a masculine gender.

by the name Sharayu and joins the river Ganga in Bihar. The length of the Ghagra is 1080 Km (Government of India, 1980).

Figure 2: Movement of the River Ghagra



Source: Google Maps downloaded in July 2009

The Ghagra basin has a total catchment of 1,27,950 sq km of which 57,647 km is in India, and the rest being in Nepal. Parts of the basin are low lying lands called 'chaurs' which remain submerged for a considerable period in a year. Ghagra brings large quantities of silt during the floods and deposits the same in its bed which results in its tendency to meander and consequently to inundate vast areas. Ghagra's (called as Gogra in imperial gazettes) tendency to meander and to cause erosion has been noted in imperial gazettes. Bahraich was in imperial times a part of the Oudh province, according to the 1877-78 Gazetteer for Oudh:

"The numerous channels with which this alluvial plain is scored in all parts testify to the fact that it has been subjected at different times to fluvial action. These channels, of which some now form mere drainage streams and some are dry

throughout the greater part of the year, have a general direction, tortuous as their courses are, parallel to that of the river and thus suggest the notion that at sometime or other they formed the actual bed of the river which has now deserted them, while such lakes as the Nigri, Ganaur, Anarkali, Chittaur and Baghel Tal, can never have been scored out by anything but a very large volume of water such as now finds its way in the Gogra...” (Benett, 1993 [1877-78] p. 96)

Due to the fluvial action, the soil of Ghagra basin is alluvial and is fertile except where sandy soil is more prominently found. Another imperial gazetteer note that Ghagra’s fluvial action had a destructive tendency unlike other rivers such as Sarju and Rapti in the basin. It describes: “The large rivers constantly flood their banks, but the Sarju and Rapti generally deposit good silt, while the Gogra causes damage by bringing down sand” (Imperial Gazetteer of India: Provincial Series, 1984 p. 412).

According to residents in Ghagrapur and neighbouring villages, about 50 years ago⁹, the river Ghagra use to run close to Rampur Mathura, a village in the adjoining Sitapur district currently separated from Ghagrapur and Baundi by a distance of 12 km between them. Thus older people from Ghagrapur recounted how they had to walk for a long time to reach the river bank in those days. The river has changed its course over the last 50 years and is at its current place submerging parts of the researched villages today. The village of Ghagrapur was in a different location in 1952; about three km further down than its current location. Ghagrapur had experienced its first erosion in 1952, and most of the residents had then come over to the current village site which was uninhabited then and settled in it renaming it Ghagrapur. After two years of the erosion in 1952, the river had again changed its course, but the residents now resettled on the current site had continued to stay there although once the river water had receded they had reclaimed their agricultural lands and started farming again. This situation had continued till 2007 and 2008 when parts of the current site of the village Ghagrapur were once again eroded by the river Ghagra. Similar is the case with the other villages: namely the Mithapur, Laxmanpur and Baundi, all of which have suffered from severe erosion between 1999-2008, a phenomenon which continues to date.

Some of the residents who have lost their houses and agricultural lands in these villages due to erosion are now therefore staying on the Belha Behroli embankment, which runs

⁹ This thesis has used ethnographic research methods which are discussed in detail in the methodology chapter.

through the researched villages. The Belha Behroli embankment is 95 km long and was built in 1955-56 (Srivastava & Upadhyaya, 2007) to protect villages on the other side of embankment from the flood water of Ghagra. However, Ghagrapur, Mithapur, Laxmanpur and Baundi are on the non protected side of the embankment and receive flood waters from Ghagra. After heavy rains in the hills of Nepal, the 2007 and 2008 had seen major floods in these villages and caused destruction to houses, and livelihoods of the people staying in there. A gauge at village Baundi measures the river water levels, with 113.15 meters being considered as a danger level: that is, a level after which water from the River Ghagra starts entering the surrounding agricultural lands and the village. 2007 had seen a maximum discharge of 3,75,000 cusecs¹⁰ of river water with the danger level crossed a number of times, the maximum level recorded being 113.9 meters at Baundi on first September 2007. In 2008, the river saw a maximum discharge of 537,887 cusec of water with the maximum level recorded being 114.7 meters on 23rd September 2008 at Baundi (District Engineer, November 2008). The following figures 3 & 4 show the effects of floods in village Ghagrapur in September 2008.

In addition to the Belha Behroli embankment, the Government has also constructed a stud and three spurs at Baundi village so that it can check the eroding tendencies of Ghagra at this village. Spurs are protruding structures into the river built to direct its course away from a bank area vulnerable to river erosion. Smaller spurs are called as studs (Noble, 2007). The erosion by the River Ghagra can be quite deep as figure 5 shows the lands lost in Baundi due to river erosions between 1999 -2007.

1.8 Chapter concluding remarks:

This chapter has introduced the context and the subject matter of the thesis. It has also given an introductory discussion on disaster theory and rights and located the research question studied within the broad contours of these theories. The next chapter “Theoretical Framework” will engage with disaster as well as various social theories in much more depth to develop a framework to analyse the research questions of this thesis.

¹⁰ Cusec is a measure of flow of water and means cubic feet of water per second.

Figure 3: Village Ghagrapur after the floods of September 2008



Source: Supriya Akerkar

Figure 4: Village Ghagrapur after the floods of September 2008



Source: Supriya Akerkar

Source: Subdivision office flood works, Bahriach, UP, India

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Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

This Chapter outlines and discusses the general theoretical framework guiding this thesis, and clarifies the epistemological basis for the research strategy and the general analytic used to undertake a critical assessment of rights in disasters.

The theoretical framework discusses the legacy of human rights discourse and its links with governance or practices of governmentality and modernity by discussing critically the works of social contract and liberal rights theorists such as Kant, Mill, Locke, Hobbes (Hobbes, 1947; Locke, 1963; Kant, 1970a; Kant, 1970b; Rousseau, 1973; Mill, 2004) and that of recent critical political theorists such as Agamben, Arendt, Brown and Baxi (Arendt, 1962; Agamben, 1995; Brown, 2002; Baxi, 2006). This discussion shows the exclusionary and inclusionary logic implied in the constructions of human rights. This has implications for understanding human rights in relation to disasters, as this thesis seeks to do.

An analysis of different disaster paradigms in this theoretical framework shows that the social vulnerability paradigm posits a rights based approach in so far as it proposes a strategy to reduce inequities that contribute to the social vulnerability to disasters. However a critique of modern notions of human rights and their inclusionary and exclusionary logic calls for a need to engage with the rights discourses in *more* critical ways in disasters.

This theoretical framework proposes that a social vulnerability approach critically should assess rights through an inclusion of the subaltern meanings or constructs of rights and moral economy structures and through the subaltern critique of, or collusion with, the governmental framing or institutionalization of rights. The framework further elaborates a distinction between the politics *for* human rights which stands for progressive politics and a politics *of* human rights which stands for governmentality of rights following Baxi (2006) and Foucault (1991) in order to undertake critical assessment of rights.

This theoretical framework is built from an inter-disciplinary body of knowledge and draws from the subaltern theory, human rights and political theory, feminist theory, and disaster theory in particular.

2.2 Human rights, exclusions and governmentality: unravelling and questioning its connection with the teleological view of modernity and progress

Ideals of human rights have a deep relation with the modernity and European enlightenment tradition. As Chakrabarty (2000) says

“The phenomenon of “political modernity” – namely, the rule by modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise – is impossible to *think* of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe. Concepts such as citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the individual, distinctions between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social justice, scientific rationality, and so on all bear the burden of European thought and history...The European colonizer of the nineteenth century both preached this Enlightenment humanism at the colonized and at the same time denied it in practice” (Chakrabarty, 2000 p. 4)

This remark by Chakrabarty is a reminder of how certain conceptual categories are now globalised and used to understand and critique the social worlds of people across nations. For example, the critique of caste based oppression or women’s inequality in India derive from the doctrine of fundamental rights discourse within the Indian Constitution, in itself a progressive document that embraces in abstract the key rational Enlightenment ideas of equality and liberty. Yet alongside these remarks, Chakrabarty also reminds us of the dubious history of the association of Enlightenment thoughts with the history of colonialism, or more so, of its association with the inclusion in rights for certain sections of people and the exclusion from the legacy of rights of others: such as colonized subjects or women in general.

For example, the problematic of colonial history shows that the discourse of human rights was used as a colonial tool to subjugate the colonized ‘natives’ who were not ‘human’ enough to rule themselves and needed the civilized West to rule it in order to become ‘human’ (Baxi 2006). Within India, for example, as critics have observed, the colonial Government had bestowed subject hood but not citizenship on Indians as they were not considered civilized enough for self-rule or citizenship and therefore were kept, as Chakrabarty calls in a “waiting-room” (Chakrabarty, 2000 p. 9).

Some of the best Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant, and those in the liberal rights tradition namely John Stuart Mill, whose theories have influenced the discourse of rights of the autonomous individual – for example the right to equality and liberty – have denied citizenship rights to sections of populations within their own countries or the colonized nations. This critical evaluation of the Enlightenment theories have led to a questioning of the teleological view of progress and modernity which gave an inferior selfhood to some sections in a civilisation ladder, due to their lack of scientific rationality. Since colonialism was closely allied with the European Enlightenment tradition and ideals of modernity, rights and progress, it has led to a critical interrogation of social theories or human sciences, which thought of colonized countries as having to ‘catch up’ with the modern west or which excluded sections of populations from universal enfranchisement.

This shows, in the first instance, the intimate relation between the idea of governmentality or a will to rule with the rights discourse in general. The concept of governmentality was introduced by Foucault (1991), to study the triangle of “sovereignty – discipline – government, which has as its primary target the population” (Foucault, 1991 p. 102). Governmentality in this sense refers to an ensemble of governmental apparatus, institutions and discourses, which together form “complex form of power” leading to “governmentalization of the state” (Foucault, 1991 pp. 102-103)¹¹. The idea of governmentality is invoked in this theoretical framework, in general, to interrogate the relationship between statist practices of governance of populations and the discourse of rights; its paradoxical effects of right and rightlessness of the human subjects or the governing populations.

In the forthcoming subsection I discuss some of the theorists whose works have influenced modern notions of progress, democracy, and rights to equality and liberty; to uncover the connection of their thought with governmentality and its effects.

2.2.1 Modernity’s tryst with right and rightlessness

The modern forms of citizenships and civilian government with its associated liberal political rights of equality and liberty are attributed to several works associated with the

¹¹ The idea of governmentality is further discussed in the empirical chapter “Rights and Governmentality: Famine Responses in colonial India” which explores the colonial discourse on disasters and rights and its effects.

Enlightenment tradition; one of the major ones being the work of political theorists who have proposed the notion of a social contract as an ideal for governance.

The notion of governance is one of the old concepts in political theory. The work of Thomas Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Kant and their conception of the “social contract” can be seen to be founding some of the basic premises around which modern ideas of governance have been based. The idea of the social contract suggests that humans made a mutual contract with to live and behave in certain ways with each-other, a contract enforced by a representative body, namely the government. Thus, in this political theory, there exists a social contract between the governed and their representative government which gives it a certain legitimacy to rule. Modern forms of democracies are formed from this notion of governance which guarantees the socio-political right of its citizens to be governed by the government of their choice.

The liberal rights tradition has also been informed by the works of utilitarian theorists such as Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill amongst others who have built on the foundations of thoughts laid by these social contract theorists. In this sub-section, I discuss the conception of rights by some of the key enlightenment and liberal rights thinkers to show that while on one hand this conception of rights had an emancipatory element, it also paradoxically made certain sections of people rightless and therefore subhuman.

Kant, one of the key Enlightenment thinkers and a social contract theorist, for example, denies the capability of voting, and thus full citizenship rights to women and certain classes of property-less people such as “apprentices to merchants or tradesmen, servants”, by making a distinction between active and passive citizens, with the passive citizens or dependent groups being relegated to the status of disenfranchised for not having independent “civil personality”. Kant argues:

“women in general and all those who are obliged to depend for their living ... have no civil personality, and their existence is, so to speak, purely inherent ... they are all mere auxiliaries to the common wealth, for they have to receive orders or protection from other individuals, so that they do not possess civil independence. This dependence upon the will of others and consequent inequality does not, however, in any way conflict with the freedom and equality of all men as *human beings* who together constitute people. On the contrary, it is only by accepting these conditions that such a people can become a state and enter into a civil constitution. But all are not equally qualified within this constitution to possess the right to vote, i.e to be citizens ... as passive members of the state” (Kant, 1970b pp. 139-140)

Further, Kant also validates the slave system, in certain circumstances, where, for example, slaves have lost their civil status or their citizenship “through some *crime* of his own doing”. Kant further contends

“If the latter is the case, he may indeed be kept alive, but he will be made a mere instrument of another person (either the state or another citizen). Anyone in this position is a *bondman or slave* (*servus in sensu stricto*) and is part of the *property* (*dominium*) of someone else, who is therefore not just his *master* (*herus*), but also his *owner* (*dominus*); the latter may accordingly make him over to anyone else as a chattel or use him as he wishes (except for infamous purposes), and he may *dispose of* his powers, although not of his life and limbs, at his own discretion” (Kant, 1970b p. 153)

Thus sex, class, race (to the extent that the slavery in particular was based on racial differences) are all invoked in Kantian notion of citizenship which does not allow certain groups of people to be full political citizens and equal right holders or be full civil personalities or free persons. Thus notwithstanding the notion of the ‘free individual’; racial, class-based and gender-based difference and domination were also protected by the pioneers of these theories of rights and governance to some degree. That is, freedom and subordination, right and rightlessness, inclusion and exclusion were constituted and made real through the sphere of civil society and the state, both products of “an age of enlightenment” and “progress” to use the Kant’s words (Kant, 1970c pp. 57-58).

John Stuart Mill one of the British parliamentarian and a utilitarian theorist, and otherwise an advocate of liberal rights tradition, upholds women’s voting rights in Britain but denies republican or elected forms of government and self rule to colonies such as India as he has low opinion of the capability of the “Oriental” character to undertake this form of government. Mill discusses situations where elected forms of governance cannot be undertaken: “These are principally when the people, in order to advance in civilisation, have some lesson to learn, some habit not yet acquired, to the acquisition of which representative government is likely to be an impediment”(Mill, 2004 p. 53). Mill distinguishes between two forms of British Colonies, one such as Canada or Australia which consists of European races and another such as India, which is racially distinct from the colonial centre. He advocates a full representative government to those colonies inhabited by people of European descent, but withholds such representative government to those colonies who are racially different and says “(Such colonies) must be governed by the dominant country, or by persons delegated for that purpose by it. This mode of

government is as legitimate as any other, if it is the one which in the existing state of civilisation of the subject people most facilitates their transition to a higher stage of improvement”(Mill, 2004 p. 220).

Feminist critics such as Carole Pateman (1988) points out the exclusion of women from the social contract theories of Hobbes (1647), Rousseau (1739), Locke (1690) and the associated ideals of freedom. Pateman (1988) points out that in England, marriage was like a slave contract, remnants of which she says, remained till as late as the 1980s. She argues that the theory of sexual contract in theories of social contract is validated on similar grounds to that of the slave contract thus upholding the dominance of men over women. A new form of patriarchal dominance that controls women through a fraternal contract between men is legitimated through the social contract, because: “The new civil society created through the original [social] contract is a patriarchal social order” (Pateman, 1988 p. 1). The social contract formed between free individuals is essentially a male freedom instituted as a political right. Thus for Pateman, the “original [social] contract constitutes both freedom and domination” (Pateman, 1988, p. 2). The paternal authority ensures thus that women enter into the social contract through a participation in the private realm, which is a part of the civil society but also separated from it. Thus the social contract constitutes the modern story of patriarchy, where in women subordination is continued by their marginalisation in the public sphere. Further, the rationality and independence which is considered key in the formulations of some of the social contract theorists leads to men and certain classes of people only being party to this civil contract. Thus women do not enter into this contract except via a sexual contract through a paternal authority in the family, as do certain classes such as slaves or property less people through their masters.

This relation between the teleological view of modernity, progress, narratives of rationality and rights, a paradoxical one between the empowerment, and enfranchisement of certain sections of populations on the one hand, and the colonization and oppression of other sections such as colonized people, women, on the other, brings to light the intimate connection between the will to rule or governmentality and rights. Foucault’s critical work has shown that discourses about social reality do not only represent the reality, rather they construct reality (Foucault, 1980). In that sense the connection between modernity, rights and its narratives and the disempowerment (and empowerment) of certain groups of people needs to be understood more critically; that is not just as reflecting accidents of history, but

rather through their complicity in constructing that history. More recently, human rights theorists in India such as Baxi (2006) have explored this connection between governmentality and rights in contemporary societies and in particular, in India by distinguishing between two uses of rights: namely “politics *of* and *for* human rights”¹² (Baxi, 2006 p. 152). Whilst the politics *of* human rights feeds on governmentality, the politics *for* human rights affirms the universal humanity and dignity of all human beings. In the next section, I critically interrogate the nexus between the current discourse on human rights and governmentality to suggest that a research study such as this, which seeks to understand the relation between rights and disasters, needs to explore a discursive terrain of rights beyond a modern conception of human rights and its institutionalization by the state apparatus.

2.2.2 Rights and governmentality: need to go beyond?

Hannah Arendt shows the connection between the birth of human rights and the attendant birth of nationalism when she remarks that “the whole question of human rights, therefore, was quickly and inextricably blended with the question of national emancipation; only the emancipated sovereignty of the people, of one’s own people, seemed to be able to insure them” (Arendt, 1962 p. 291) Further, Arendt shows how the idea of human rights linked now with national sovereignty that is people having political rights as national citizens, was paradoxically now also a basis for the production of another category of people – namely rightless people – who were designated “stateless” or refugees: people who had to leave their homeland in search of safety and security. Without a political community that these people could call their own, the international regime of human rights adopted in 1948 through universal declaration of human rights deemed almost meaningless and seems to falter on their promises to these categories of people.

Indeed the ‘universal declaration of human rights’ 1948 as well as the later covenants of civil, political and social, economic and cultural rights adopted in 1969 and now a constituent of the international human rights regime, stand a witness to the fact that human rights principles and its laws are aspects of national territorial laws to be adopted by the nation-states through their ratification of UN declaration and covenants. The new international laws – such as the right to development or the environmental declarations

¹² Building upon Baxi I will use ‘politics *of* rights’ and ‘politics for rights’ to distinguish between two forms of politics throughout the thesis.

post-1992 after the Rio summit – all become meaningful within the ambit of nation-states and their sovereignty. The different generations of human rights as they are sometimes called – with the first generation denoting the arrival of civil and political rights, the second the arrival of social, economic and cultural rights, the third, the arrival of rights such as the right to development and now the fourth the right to a sustainable environment – all remain a witness to the vulnerability of the exercise of these rights as universal rights when they are treated as instruments of nation-states. Human Rights take the form of ratification, signatures, and passing of the state laws by individual nations which undertake to ratify these UN led international laws. Baxi (2006) calls these governmental or state-led ways of affirming human rights laws as “governmentality” after Foucault (1991).

Baxi suggests that human rights discourse remains entrenched within “state-craft” and is integral to contingencies arising from the “politics of governmental and intergovernmental desires” (Baxi, 2006 p. xiv). This leads Baxi to argue that this ‘governmentality’ of ‘human rights’ feeds on meanings of human rights producing subjection of the human beings that it seeks to free. The works of Foucault can be read from this perspective as he critiques the many forms of governmentality and its subjections¹³. As Baxi (2006, pp.15-16) notes:

“Governance emerges simultaneously as a complex site of human rights affirmative practices of politics and as a register of material political labours that forever produce forms of human rightlessness. The normative human rights languages and logics offer conceptions of ‘good’ governance that seek to...address the problem of legitimacy of the power to rule”

Baxi’s critique that the governmentality of human rights produces human rightlessness is vindicated when seen through some of the recent UN led attempts to universalise human rights. For example, the recent global attempts to address social and economic rights of people were made through the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) that the United Nations and its member countries set to achieve. The MDG standards set by this global community through a plethora of targets were, very minimal and have been critiqued by some of the radical civil society groups (Baxi 2006). For example, how does one evaluate the UN commitment to *only* halve the number of people and children who live in hunger and malnourished state by 2015 against its commitment to the universal basic human right to life? And going by the progress on even these minimal indicators, it appears that even they may not be met in a world where food is in abundance and large sections of its

¹³ The Foucauldian notion of governmentality is explored in the empirical chapter “Rights and Governmentality: Famine Responses in Colonial India”

population live in levels of affluence unheard in earlier centuries. In his foreword for the UN report on the progress of MDGs for 2010, the secretary general for the UN, Ban Ki-Moon says “it is clear that improvements in the lives of the poor have been unacceptably slow, and some hard-won gains are being eroded by the climate, food and economic crisis” (United Nations, 2010 p. 3).

Another example in that direction, is the current relevance of Arendt’s (1962, p. 295) insight that a figure of the stateless person is a condition of fundamental “rightlessness” when understood through the current regime of human rights and the way in which current humanitarian discourse around assistance to the stateless person and the refugee is framed and practiced. UNHCR refers to stateless persons as including people who have no nationalities under national law or have a disputed nationality; while refugees refer to people who are forced to flee their homelands or their country of origin due to conflicts, disasters or humanitarian crisis situations, or persecutions on account of race, or political views. UNHCR has estimated that in 2009, there are 10.4 million refugees who come under UNHCR’s direct responsibility across the world. Further in 2009, 6.6 million stateless persons from 60 countries were identified by UNHCR, who also estimates that in reality the total number of stateless persons is almost double that is 12 million worldwide (UNHCR, 2010).

The condition of these people displaced from their homes who may be living a life of refugees is vulnerable and difficult as the report of the UNHCR says

“Hundreds of thousands of people continue to be uprooted by war and human rights abuses every year, and usually move within or between the poorest and least stable countries in the world. These people often find themselves in states that lack the capacity, willingness or resources to provide them even a minimal degree of assistance and protection. The efforts of humanitarian agencies to step into the breach are often impeded by dangerous political and security conditions” (UNHCR, 2006 p. 9).

Further, stateless communities continue to be discriminated against and receive no assistance from any state following major disasters as experiences of Sea Gypsies or

Mokens – a stateless community¹⁴ – show after the Tsunami affected Thailand and islands around it in 2004 (Akerkar, 2007).

Remarking on the rightlessness of persons who have no land to call their own, Arendt contends:

“The calamity of the rightless is not that they are deprived of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, or of equality before the law and freedom of opinion ... but that they no longer belong to any community whatsoever. Their plight is not that they are not equal before the law, but that no law exists for them” (Arendt, 1962 pp. 295 -296).

Arendt’s analysis shows that paradoxically, the human rights regime and discourse which claim themselves as inalienable, indivisible and universal, falter precisely at a time, when confronted with a refugee or a stateless person who has no other identity but their bare human-ness to claim as their own. Thus Arendt concludes:

“The conception of human rights, based upon the assumed existence of a human beings as such, broke down at the very moment when those who professed to believe in it were for the first time confronted with people who had indeed lost all other qualities and specific relationships –except that they were still human. The world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human”. (Arendt, 1962, p. 299)

This rightless status of a refugee or a stateless person ironically confirm the arguments of Edmund Burke who had refuted the “Rights of Man” declaration after the French revolution and in whose response Thomas Paine, had written his famous “*Rights of Man*” in defence of the French revolution, a work considered to be the first declaration of universal and inalienable human rights. Burke had argued at that time against an abstraction of rights as universal or inalienable and instead argued that rights be considered as “entailed inheritance” of rights which one transmits to one’s children like life itself” (Arendt, 1962, p. 299).

Arendt extends her critique to the stateless Jews in Nazi Germany who were devoid of political citizenship and were left with nothing except their bare bodies as human beings to show. Arendt claims, such states are dangerous as in the case of the Jews, who were treated as stateless persons: that is for not being Germans before their actual exterminations began; as in such original states, they can be treated and regarded like

¹⁴ The Mokens who have historically been a nomadic sea community is not recognised as citizens although they are now settled on a Lao island claimed by Thailand. As a result they were not given state support after the tsunami. (Akerkar 2007)

savages or beasts who have no other claim but that of bare survival or bare life (Arendt, 1962) Arendt's assertion leads us to the question, why is such *bare life* or bare survival devoid of political citizenship excluded from current universal human rights regimes or practices which seek to give refugees and stateless persons, humanitarian assistance to survive at the most but not civil and political rights? The answer to this question can be deciphered from the work of Agamben, who takes the Foucauldian critique of modernity's linkage with bio-power to its completion.

Drawing on Greek difference between *zoe* (or bare life – which etymologically means a bare life shared by all life forms – animals, humans and all living being) and *bios* (which means a form of living that is proper for a particular group) Agamben argues that modern democracy's mission has been “a liberation of *zoe*, and that it is constantly trying to transform its own bare life into a way of life and to find, so to speak, the *bios* of *zoe*”(Agamben, 1995 p. 9). The work of state power is to enable the politicisation of *zoe*; where in *zoe* is the object as well as the subject of transformation; where-in the bare life of the human is transformed through disciplinary processes into a political life under the rubric of rights and liberties. In this way, only by transforming the bare life through politics, thereby including it and by the very same token also excluding the bare life, modern political sovereignty can begin to assert itself. Agamben calls this inclusion by way of exclusion a form of exception. Bare life, therefore, Agamben argues “remains included in politics in the form of the exception, that is something that is included through an exclusion”(Agamben, 1995 p. 11).

Agamben calls the production of such bare life by the Sovereign power “*homo sacer*” that is, that which is neither inside nor outside. Modern sovereign power with its declaration of ‘rights of man’ or human rights acts, produces such *homo sacer*, to liberate the *zoe*. Thus the birth of nation-states and sovereign powers are enjoined through human rights discourse and practices in the production of *homo sacer*. Arendt's comment on the ironical exclusion of refugees and stateless persons from universal human rights discourse and practices, can now from Agamben's analysis be seen as a state of exception, and in that sense be called the persons or represent *homo sacer* who are politically neither inside nor outside, those who can be the objects of a humanitarian mission, but not the holders of the ‘inalienable’ human rights (Agamben, 1995).

This critique of rights by Agamben and Arendt shows how historically the production of *homo sacer* which is neither inside nor outside has been one of the functions of the modern state. Such a *homo sacer* has been produced by the state power through distinctions between nature and culture or between colonized and colonizers, or men and women such that colonized people, or women or racially different people were treated as people who were neither inside nor outside and therefore who could be subjects but not citizens with universal rights. This historical conjoining of experiences of political exclusion and governmentality through state power – which produced *homo sacer* – a racialised colonised native, sheds light on why the Enlightenment and liberal rights traditions discussed above worked through exclusions and inclusions of human rights. It also shows why and how contemporary human rights discourses have led to two kinds of politics: that of human rights through the state which includes humanitarian actions but excludes full citizenship rights for certain categories of human beings, thus making human rights an inherently conservative project; and a politics *for* human rights through emancipatory movements where-in thresholds of defining and politicising the *bare life* or a production of *homo sacer* by the state has been constantly challenged.

This governmentality of human rights discourse as opposed to its universalist claims has also been critiqued by poststructuralist thinkers who argue that the modern human subject has been a product of disciplinary discourses which seeks to discipline it under the rubric of emancipation. A post structuralist critique suggests that the state and its laws are themselves regulatory sites which regulate social relations and produce certain identities and subjectivities through a discourse of rights. Brown et al (2002) identify some of the paradoxes of rights discourse. They argue, firstly, these identity based rights and subjectivities can be double-edged that is “they can be crucial sites of cultural belonging and political mobilization, but they can also be important vehicles of domination through regulation” (Brown & Halley, 2002 p. 7). Secondly, as a Marxist critique of liberal rights has shown, “rights differentially empower different social groups, depending on their ability to enact the power that a right potentially entails” (Brown, 2002 p. 423). Thirdly, as rights holders appear as subjects of these rights depending upon the issue at stake – for example on the basis of gender, or other identities such as caste, or ethnicity, or disability, but never has internally complex beings – this impedes any politically nuanced inclusive human identity. Thus rights as produced by law and state paradoxically regulate and even solidify the discursive formations that produce the marginalised experience of identity in

the first place. In this way, Brown shows the various paradoxes that a discourse of rights project entails.

Reflecting on the context of rights discourse which sought to question women's subordination, Brown et al argue:

"If feminism once aimed to make women the sexual equals of men, this aim entails the complex social, psychological, and political project of making gender differently, and not simply the legal one of protecting (historically and culturally produced) vulnerable women from (historically and culturally produced) rapacious men"... Rather it is to assert the possibility of political life and political projects not fully saturated by legalistic constraints and aims. It is to recover radically democratic political aims from legalism's grip in order to cultivate collective political and cultural deliberation about governing values and practices" (Brown et al 2002 p. 20)

Brown's critique suggests that what is needed is a revaluation of a political life that goes beyond the legal and constitutional notions of rights and its disciplinary constraints. The paradox of rights discourse that has been discussed in this subsection via Baxi, Arendt, Agamben and Brown leads us to ask the question that Brown asks, that is how do we deal with such paradox of rights affirmation?

"How might paradox gain political richness when it is understood as affirming the impossibility of justice in the present and as articulating the conditions and contours of justice in the future? How might attention to paradox help formulate a political struggle for rights in which they are conceived neither as instruments nor as ends, but as articulating through their instantiation what equality and freedom might consist in that exceeds them? In other words, how might the paradoxical elements of the struggle for rights in an emancipatory context articulate a field of justice beyond ... "(Brown, 2002, p. 432)

There are no easy answers to this question, but this theoretical framework seeks to engage with the implications of these paradoxes for undertaking research into rights and disasters; in the context of India, as this thesis does. It thus justifies certain theoretical choices made by this thesis, and hence the framing of the research questions, the methodological choices and the treatment of the empirical material. In order to engage with the paradoxes of rights in the context of India, the next section analyses the human rights discourse in the context of India and disasters.

In India too, the human rights trajectory needs to be understood, in the first instance within the purview of the nation-state and its laws. The next section assesses India's human rights

and governmentality link through the workings of law and constitutionalism in general and in disasters in particular.

2.3 India's human rights trajectory: law and constitutionalism

India's human rights enunciations can be best considered through India's secular constitution which after its independence, was given birth by the freedom movement and a moral urge to deal with the inequalities pervading India at that time. The language of the Indian constitution adopted in 1949 soon after the adoption of the universal declaration of rights in 1948 were such that they furthered universal human rights through 'basic fundamental rights' enshrined in the constitution, for all its citizenry.

With its emphasis on social justice and fundamental rights for its citizens, and directive principles of state policy which promotes an egalitarian ethos, the Indian constitution affirms liberal human right standards. The progressive features in the constitution include, amongst others, the right to equality, liberty and opportunity, the banning of untouchability. The Constitution also makes a positive discrimination in the interest of the members of scheduled caste as historically marginalised sections of the society through a reservation of a certain percent number of seats to them in certain state run institutions. This reservation is followed in educational institutions, public sector jobs and political representations. The Indian constitution sustains the rule of the state by vesting it with several powers, but at the same time, makes it accountable through its duty to uphold fundamental rights of the citizenry which has now come to be known as the 'basic structure of the constitution' (Baxi, 2007). Further, it also provides for judicial reviews – through which the judiciary can review the features of any legislation interpreting it through constitutional provisions. The establishment of the National Human Rights Commission in 1993 has further made it possible for citizens to take up issues of human rights violations with the Commission which has the mandate to review and hear such cases.

The Indian Constitution had two basic features to it: the fundamental rights and the directive principles of the state policy; with the civil and political rights being a part of fundamental rights, and social and economic rights being a part of the directive principles to be progressively realised by the state. Whilst this separation was thought initially to have marked the economic and social rights as non-justiciable, progressive interpretations by the judiciary have brought many of them within the ambit of justiciability (Baxi:2007):

for example, with regard to the fundamental rights in particular, article 21; the “Right to Life”, has been broadened by the judiciary to include ‘life with dignity’ and therefore also the entitlement to other rights, such as the right to adequate nutrition, shelter and a clean environment¹⁵.

The fundamental rights discourse within India has been used by the social movements to further the human rights of the marginalised groups, just as judiciary has pushed the human rights discourse much further. The women’s social movements have by using the equality rights as enshrined by the Constitution pushed the state to evolve laws which further gender justice such as equal wages in the Minimum Wages Act¹⁶, as well as rights to bodily dignity by the framing of anti-rape laws, anti-sexual harassment laws and now the domestic violence law. Similarly, the *dalit* movement has led to the framing of anti-atrocity acts against SCs and STs (Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes) which, as marginalised groups, enjoy constitutional protections. The work of the non-party political movements in India, such as Right to Food or Right to Information, has also broadened the democratic rights of its citizens. These progressive activities by the above groups can be deemed as instantiating the politics *for* rights in India.

Alongside these positive achievements, there have also been setbacks: the chief of these concerning the rights of women, which continues to discriminate against the female sex across religions on issues of property. The analysis by feminist legal theorists such as Ratna Kapur (2007) about the uses of the rights framework by progressive forces within the country shows that the state’s role cannot be understood in a dichotomous way as a protector or a regulator. Rather, the state is a site of contestation of different discourses. Law needs to be understood as a discursive practice with effects of both liberating as well as subordinating women. For example, while family law gives protection to women to an extent, it also feeds upon the notion of a patriarchal family, making it appear like a naturalised entity (Kapur, 2007). In other words, the Indian case shows the complex production of both the ‘politics *for* human rights’ and ‘politics *of* human rights’.

¹⁵ In the case of Consumer Education and Research Centre v. Union of India [1995 (3) SCC 42], the Supreme court notes that the government has a “positive duty to provide the basic conditions necessary to lead a life that is more than mere animal existence, including a Right to Health and a Right to Clean Environment”. In the case of Francis Cordie Vs Union territory of Delhi (1981) 1 SCC 688 Justice Bhagwati says “we think that the right to life includes the right to live with human dignity and all that goes along with it, namely the bare necessities of life such as adequate nutrition, clothing and shelter over the head and facilities for reading, writing and expressing oneself in diverse forms”.

¹⁶ See the Minimum Wages Act 1948, India.

2.3.1 India's human rights and disasters: laws and policy framework

The constitution of India does not make any separate provisions for disaster response. However, given that after disasters; there are the consequences of loss of life, of housing and livelihood destruction, and the displacement of people, the fundamental rights principle in the Indian Constitution – that is the right to life – can be invoked to say that there has been a violation of human rights and hence the need for the state to intervene after disaster (Desai, 2008)¹⁷. The rescue, relief and rehabilitation thus become the responsibility of the state, with discrimination on the basis of caste, gender or religion in these recovery processes constituting a violation of human rights. The state's duty and liability in post disaster management processes amounts to ensuring effective rehabilitation and reparation of the people affected by disasters. Further, social action groups have sometimes used the doctrine of *parens patriae* (which means that the state is a parent and has a responsibility towards its citizens) in the courts to get the state to intervene in appropriate and accountable ways following disasters¹⁸.

Further, much of the relief work done today are in principle guided by the relief codes and associated acts put in place during the colonial period and now further amended by the state after independence¹⁹. The institutional frameworks for response are also put in place by the relief codes at national and state level. Thus for example, the relief codes and associated acts made by the state of Uttar Pradesh, where this study is located, mandate the state to provide relief to people in disasters. More recently, the Indian state has passed the Disaster Management Act in 2005 after ratifying the UNISDR led Hyogo Framework for Action (2005-2015) which seeks to build disaster risk reduction framework in societies within nation states. Under India's Disaster Management Act 2005, an institutional mechanism is being promoted to link disaster risk reduction with long term development plans. This new Disaster Management Act 2005 define disasters as those calamities or catastrophes – both natural and human-made – that cause substantial loss of life or property and is of the magnitude beyond the coping capacity of the community of the affected area. Under this act, national, state level and district level disaster response and vulnerability reduction plans are to be prepared and put in place by assessing the areas in districts

¹⁷ Also see Supreme Court judgements in *Kranti Vs Union of India* (PIL) civil appeal number 2681 of 2007 on appropriateness of relief provisions following Tsunami in 2004.

¹⁸ After the Gujarat earthquake in 2001, Public interest litigation (PIL) was filed in Gujarat High court which uses the doctrine of *parens patrie*. It led to a judgement which gave citizens the right to the details of finances used by the government in earthquake rehabilitation.

¹⁹ These are discussed in detail in the empirical chapter on post-colonial India and disaster recovery.

vulnerable to disasters. Development plans of different departments are to be reviewed to ensure that mitigation and preparedness measures and capacity building are well integrated in them (The Disaster Management Act, 2005).

Alongside the relief-codes and the new Disaster Management Act 2005 are the National Five Year development plans/programmes to deal with natural disasters; undertaken since 1951 to achieve planned development in the country. Since 1951, Flood Action Programmes have been undertaken at a large scale to minimize the effects of flooding. The main interventions promoted by these flood action programmes are technocratic in nature, following the dominant hazards paradigm – discussed in the next section of this chapter. Thus these interventions give much emphasis to civil defence measures, warning systems, the building of embankments, dams and reservoirs as a way to counter floods. These programmes continue to date, and the research location, Bahraich district, and the flooding of the River Ghagra have been a part of the National as well as state flood response programme initiated by the Government.

Thus India's policy framework in relation to disaster is governed mainly through its fundamental rights and in particular the right to life, which in turn guides states post-disaster intervention as well as programmes for flood prevention or flood risk mitigation²⁰. In spite of progressive judicial interpretations of the right to life as encompassing right to dignity, critics have argued that the real response of the state encompasses the bare minimum and is insufficient to enable full and proper reparation²¹. Further, the right to life shows paradoxical impacts as in the case of the Tsunami of 2004, where the government of Tamil Nadu circular order said that all destroyed "houses within 200 metres of the High Tide Line" were to be relocated under the rubric of "safety" with government assistance of 3,323 \$ while all persons "who do not choose to do so will be permitted to undertake the repairs on their own in the existing locations, but they will not be eligible for any assistance from the Government"²². Thus this means that traditional fisher folk who want to rebuild their houses in-situ as their livelihood depends upon their access to the coast, and

²⁰ Human rights advocate Mihir Desai in his personal communication shared how their public interest litigation with the Bombay High Court had led to an order to the Mumbai Municipal Corporation to put up a rain gauge in Mumbai city so that they are aware about the probability of floods in the wake of incessant rains and a need to a better drainage system. Such court orders show the recognition of the citizen's right to disaster preparedness and risk reduction by appropriate technical measures by the state.

²¹ See interim report by National people's tribunal on tsunami recovery; [http://www.hic-net.org/content/Jury%20Verdict-tsunami\(1\).pdf](http://www.hic-net.org/content/Jury%20Verdict-tsunami(1).pdf)

²² See government order No 172 by the Tamilnadu government on tsunami; as quoted in National People's Tribunal Interim Report; [http://www.hic-net.org/content/Jury%20Verdict-tsunami\(1\).pdf](http://www.hic-net.org/content/Jury%20Verdict-tsunami(1).pdf)

hence are required to stay close to the sea, are thus when forced with the choice of relocation to a new site, denied their right to livelihood.. The Tamil Nadu order, therefore, constructs the discourse on the right to life through the opposition between the safety of life or *zoe* that is the bare life, and the right to livelihood or way of life, that is *bios*, of the traditional fisher folks affected by the Tsunami. In this case, *zoe* or bare life is politicised in such a way that it excludes the *bios* of the *zoe*: the state only affirming the right of the affected traditional fisher folk to a bare living but not to a dignified livelihood – following the disaster of the Tsunami.

Having explored the disaster governance and rights frameworks in India, I discuss in the next section, the disaster governance and rights as enunciated in the major disaster theories and paradigms. The governance and rights paradigms proposed by the disaster theories will be reflected through the lenses of the above discussions on the production of rights and its links with governmentality or progressive action.

2.4 Governance and rights in perspectives on disasters:

The natural hazards and social vulnerability perspective are dominant paradigms used to understand disasters. Further, some theorists, have also advocated for a political ecology and uncertainty perspective on disasters. In this section I critically discuss these four perspectives to appraise their respective approaches to governance and rights.

I analyse the idea of governance in these perspectives and its relation to rights, if any; both explicit and implicit, through the interventionist strategies they propose as a way to steer away from the making of the disasters. The word governance can be traced back to the Latin word *gubernare* which in turn is derived from Greek *kubernao* whose meaning is to *steer*. Traditionally, political authorities have been vested with the powers to steer the society and its resources in a particular direction of a social good. Pierre (2000) says:

“Governance has a dual meaning; on the one hand it refers to the empirical manifestations of state adaptation to its external environment as it emerges in the late twentieth century. On the other hand, governance also denotes a conceptual or theoretical representation of co-ordination of social systems and, for the most part, the role of the state in that process”(Pierre, 2000 p. 3).

The different perspectives on disaster adopt different steering strategies – or governance strategies – which align them with a different set of discourses about disaster-affected

populations or societies, or the making of disasters. By unmasking these discourses, this section will be able to evaluate their assumptions, considering the extent to which they encompass the modernist ideals of technocratic rationality, progress, and rights, which the earlier section has critically evaluated. In other words, drawing from the earlier conception of governmentality, this section will explore the relation between disaster governance, disaster discourses and rights and its effects on the populations affected by disasters.

2.4.1 The natural hazards and social behavioural approach: governance and rights

A natural hazards perspective has been a dominant perspective particularly after the works of White, Kates and Burton (White, 1945; Kates, 1971; White, 1974; Burton, Kates & White, 1978) which used the nature/culture dualism to understand human/nature relations and the disasters arising from such relations. White's initial work "Human Adjustment to Floods" (White, 1945) outlined different ways in which human beings adjusted themselves to floods, leading to several public policy debates in the management of floods and natural resources. His work shifted the then dominant understanding of disaster as acts of god to one in which human beings could act on nature to minimize the losses and reduce their physical vulnerability. Whilst disasters were mainly attributed to the natural hazard themselves, the technocratic solutions were to minimize the losses whenever a hazard strikes, a logical consequence of the approach promoted by White and his followers. Thus flood control methods, through river management, or water management strategies, and broadly speaking the natural resources management strategies were pioneered through the work of White. Further, in the context of other hazards such as earthquakes, the building of structures that, with the application of rigid building codes could withstand seismic activity, or building communities and households who could withstand such risks and other natural hazards were the dominant focus of the disaster response work inspired by natural hazards perspective (Tierney, 2007). Thus studies and disaster response practices included dealing with disaster risks, forecasting, classifying the areas as flood plains or as earthquake prone through seismic or hazard-wise zoning. The resilience to disasters was understood in terms of societal responses through technical strategies which led to the physical restructuring of nature and its effects enabling societies to withstand the effects of natural hazards. The natural hazards perspective continues to be one of the dominant paradigms informing disaster response work to date. Others such as (Bateson, 1972; Vayda & McCay, 1975) have built upon White's insights to promote the notion of

‘adaptation’ by human beings to their natural surroundings and hazards as constituent of human-ecological evolving systems.

Thus in the natural hazards approach, governance as a key concept, although not stated explicitly, emerges in management strategies, and technological solutions as human adaptation practices through which disaster effects are managed.

Complementing the natural hazards approach was the social behavioural approach identified with Fritz, Quarantelli and Dynes which studied the *crisis behaviour* during disasters using a social systems theory (Fritz, 1961; Quarantelli & Dynes, 1972). Fritz’s initial definition understood disasters as events which caused social crisis. Fritz calls disasters:

“[an]Event, concentrated in time and space, in which a society, or a relatively self-sufficient sub-division of a society, undergoes severe danger and incurs such losses to its members and physical appurtenances that the social structure is disrupted and the fulfilment of all or some of the essential functions of the society is prevented” (Fritz, 1961 p. 655)

Building upon Fritz’s work critically, Quarantelli and Dynes analyse the social organisations and institutions at work: their ability to cope with the social crisis, the changes in these organisations as a result of this crisis, and the possible emergence of new organisations as a response to it (Quarantelli & Dynes, 1973; 1977). Thus crisis presents itself as a disruption in a social order, and the main task of governance is to restore stability. Different organisations – of government and community – were analysed in disaster situations to ascertain their potential to contribute towards such social stability.

Recalling the influence of White, Quarantelli and Dynes in approaches to disaster research, Tierney argues:

“Disasters were seen as consensus crisis that enhanced social solidarity and suppressed conflict. Particularly in work guided by White’s natural hazards perspective, disasters were seen as having their root causes in societal actions (or nonactions) that limit options for adjusting to environmental extremes” (Tierney, 2007 p. 506)

Other theorisations, such as that by Stallings, have also approached the understanding of disasters from a similar social order and governance perspective. For Stallings, disasters lead to the disruption of routines, which he calls ‘exception routines’, and the main role of the state is to restore the social order and stability during disasters (Stallings, 1998).

Clearly, from the governance perspective of Quarantelli and Dynes, disasters act as research laboratories to observe the ways in which people and the social order react to such circumstances; studies which otherwise could not be undertaken in morally defensible ways in ordinary times. As Tierney (2007) points out, disaster studies were then undertaken within the overall context of the Cold War which in turn led to specific research question formulations. The governance question in disaster was an extension of the larger question of the functions of the social and government organisations and institutions – such as, for example, civil defence – and their role in responding to the crisis efficiently to restore the social order when a disaster struck.

To sum up, the governance agenda in both the natural hazards and the social behavioural perspective was driven through an institutional framework that privileged managerial and technical strategies by government and non-government actors in order to ensure and enable a stable social order. Thus, rights or entitlements do not figure in the conceptualisation of disaster or its recovery in these perspectives: that is, put another way, they make their presence felt through their absences in this discourse or by their unstated role in maintaining status quo in a given social order.

2.4.2 Social vulnerability paradigm, social order, governance and rights

The natural hazards approach inspired by White and his followers and the social behavioural approach inspired by Quarantelli et al were questioned by another paradigm, which was to become influential, namely the social vulnerability perspective, inspired through works by (O' Keefe, Westgate & Wisner, 1976; Hewitt, 1983). In this subsection, I briefly trace its historical emergence and the main facets of this perspective. As early as 1976, O'Keefe et al had argued for removal of ‘natural’ from disasters by showing that many of the disasters were in the developing countries: thus suggesting that they were a result of social vulnerability rather than effects of natural agents. Hewitt's critical analysis of the natural hazards perspective in 1983 opened up new directions in disaster research

and analysis. Questioning the dominant natural hazards view, Hewitt proposed an alternative viewpoint about disasters:

“human awareness of and responses to natural hazards are *not* dependent upon the geophysical conditions, ... Rather hazard is seen to depend upon concerns, pressures, goals, risks and, above all, orchestrated social changes that are tangential to, if not wholly indifferent to the particular society–environment relations where disaster has occurred ... natural disaster, its causes, internal features and consequences are *not* explained by conditions or behaviour peculiar to calamitous events. Rather they are seen to depend upon the ongoing social order, its everyday relations to the habitat and the larger historical circumstances that shape or frustrate these matters” (Hewitt, 1983 p. 25).

Through this critique, Hewitt was suggesting that in disasters, people’s responses should not be judged as plain responses of adjustments or adaptations to their natural surroundings. Rather, people’s responses were dependent upon the existing social order and entrenched social relations, a result of the prevalent ideology and the state- society relations. People’s responses were shaped by the social processes and their everyday social relations in their habitat and the state. Thus the ‘technocratic’ and ‘management’ solutions undertaken as a result of the natural hazards approach did nothing to change these fundamental forces which shaped people’s responses to hazards. Building upon Foucault’s notion which links discourse and power, Hewitt argued that the natural hazards discourse served already entrenched dominant “geographies of power and economy” rather than redistributing the “exercise of political and economic power” integral to reducing vulnerability of people to disasters and the “redistribution of risk by institutional means” (Hewitt, 1983 p. 27).

Moreover, Hewitt also criticised the natural hazards approach for upholding the discourse of a particular social order, which associated “normality” with governmental “notions of public safety and the practices of civil security”. Thus Hewitt criticises the natural hazards approach for aligning itself with “state formation and governmentality” which defined disaster as abnormal or extreme events that were a result of “failures of centralized safety measures and social control”(Hewitt, 1998 p 89). Defined through the discourse of extreme events, Hewitt argued that such disaster sociology therefore did not give sufficient attention to chronic problems and dangers which led to privations and even deaths during disasters. Disasters defined in this way were not a result of violence or misrule but about loss of control “within a particular kind of public order” (Hewitt, 1998 p. 90). For Hewitt, this aligning of natural hazards approach with the governmentality is equivalent to

contributing to “a more totalizing penetration of government and powerful interests into everyday life, greater surveillance and militarization of public and private space” (Hewitt 1998, p. 90). In other words, Hewitt argues that a disaster sociology and practice which works with the natural hazards approach contributes to a more authoritarian, rationalist, techno-centric regime which ultimately seeks to disempower people and consolidate the very power structures that contribute to chronic vulnerability. To take Hewitt’s logic of argument further, the natural hazards approach only furthers the rightlessness of the people affected by disasters.

Other notions such as “adaptation” used by Vayda et al (1975) were also questioned by their critics for their epistemological bias towards the Darwinian theory of evolution and a deterministic understanding of human-environment evolution (Watts, 1983). Watts also argued that the epistemological distinction made between nature/human opposition by the natural hazards approach was arbitrary and only served “inappropriate and often exploitative ends” (Watts, 1983 p. 233). Watts further argued that the natural hazards approach’s use of adaptation was based on “a rather mechanical, billiard-board view of the world in which individuals, organisms, populations and critical environmental variables interact or interface. What is lacking conversely is (lumped together in the category ‘culture’ or ‘man’ [sic]) the highly complex *social production of material life*” (Watts, 1983 p. 235). Thus Watts charged that the natural hazards approach advocated by White and his followers had “no social theory capable of addressing social process, organisation or change” a serious lacunae in understanding impacts of natural hazards and disasters (Watts, 1983 p. 240). Watts (1983), following Hewitt also argued that socio-political contexts and the place of people in any productive process were the major factors contributing to people’s responses to hazards rather than their geo-ecological surroundings.

Questioning the definition of disaster, as articulated in the natural hazards and social behavioural approach, Susman et al (1983) suggested that disasters were “*an extension of everyday life*” highlighting the need to observe disasters not just as an “event” but as being a result of socio-economic conditions of the people, that is their vulnerability in relation to their environment (Susman, O’ Keefe & Wisner, 1983 p. 263). They also put forward a definition of vulnerability as “the degree to which different classes in society are differentially at risk, both in terms of the probability of occurrence of an extreme physical event and the degree to which the community absorbs the effects of extreme physical events and helps different classes to recover” (ibid, p 264). Thus they highlighted the

differential impacts of the disasters and the need to understand disaster as a differentiated rather than a uniform event. They therefore defined disasters as “*the interface between an extreme physical event and a vulnerable human population*” (ibid, p. 264). They thus shifted the discourse on root causes of disasters from the idea of physical vulnerability as posited by the natural hazards approach to social vulnerability produced through the political economy of space and place.

These initial and highly influential critiques of the natural hazards approach defined a rival paradigm: namely, the social vulnerability or political economy approach to disasters.

Building upon these critiques was the Pressure and Release framework (PAR), advocated by Blaikie et al (1994) and Wisner et al (2004), which brought into focus an explicit political economy approach of understanding disasters. They suggested that a chain of causal linkages from “root causes”, through “dynamic pressures”, to “unsafe conditions”, led to a “progression of vulnerability” that ultimately affected people’s capacities to cope with disaster (Wisner, et al 2004 p. 51). Thus, in this analysis, people’s susceptibility to risk is mediated through social, economic and political processes of marginalisation which in turn have “nothing to do with nature as such, but are attributes of society” (Wisner, et al 2004 p. 6). Wisner et al further suggest that “people’s exposure to risk differs according to their *class* (which affects their income, how they live and where), whether they are *male* or *female*, what their *ethnicity* is, what *age group* they belong to, whether they are *disabled* or not, their *immigration status*, and so forth” (ibid, p. 6). These societal factors affected people’s vulnerability to disasters, thus PAR argued that what were needed were radical public policies such as “land reforms, enforcement of building codes and land use restrictions, greater investment in public health, provision of a clean water” as well as addressing the root causes of vulnerability such as political and economic systems which promote iniquitous power structures and access to resources (ibid, p. 7). Further, PAR suggests that access to safety or social protection measures could reduce household vulnerability. They argue that “the pattern of access in any society is subject to (and the result of) agency, decision making under externally created constraints, struggles over resources and also co-operation” (ibid, p. 112). Thus in this framework, politics of governance, (good or bad) political ideologies which shape public policies on social protection and the rights and entitlements of the people all contribute to patterns of vulnerability and resilience in society.

In a similar tone, southern networks such as Duryog Nivaran based in South Asia also suggested that disasters were a result of societal structures; as it was the place of a person within a social structure that made some people more vulnerable than others. Vulnerability to disasters arose from “immediate” as well as “root causes” (Twigg, 1998 p. 6).

Similar critiques also emerged from a feminist perspective which argued that gendered ideology significantly altered the risk to, and social vulnerability of, women and men and the impacts of disasters on men and women. Feminist theorizing in particular pointed out the patterns of gendered vulnerability and resilience which in turn affected disaster outcomes. The fact that disasters have led to more deaths of females than males, as in the case of the earthquake in Maharashtra (WHO, 2002) and in the Asian Tsunami of 2004, also showed the higher vulnerability of women as compared to men in certain disasters (Oxfam, 2005)²³. This feminist theorizing within the disaster discourse, also questioned the notion of the unified subject and suggested that male and female sufferings are different as shown through different narratives of the impacts of disasters on men and women (Enarson & Morrow, 1997; Enarson, 1998; Fothergill, 1998; Fordham, 2000; Enarson & Fordham, 2001; Fordham, 2003; 2004) and the need to direct our efforts to the root causes of social vulnerability of women (Bhatt, 1998; Ariyabandhu & Wicremasinghe, 2003; Yonder, Akcar & Gopalan, 2005).

Further, they also called for a theorisation of disaster that takes into account gender in intersection with class, caste, ethnicity, race, and disability, which leads to differential impacts in specific historical and social contexts (Peacock, Morrow & Gladwin, 1997) (Manning, 2006; Kailes, 2007; Ray-Bennett, 2009; Suar, 2007). This analysis emphasised women’s socially constructed invisibility that made them more vulnerable before, during and after the disaster (Fordham 2000; Enarson and Fordham 2001) (Fordham & Ketteridge, 1998). Gender blind decisions by intervening agencies in a disaster context impacted women’s work load and in turn marginalised them from partaking in the decision making processes of the agencies that intervened in disasters (Fordham 2004). Other social constraints such as the restricted mobility of female headed households – in some contexts in public spaces – also led to their being left out of humanitarian assistance, thus increasing their vulnerability (Bryne & Baden, 1995; Akerkar, 2007).

²³ In certain situations such as armed conflict, men too can be equally or even more vulnerable as the case of Somalia shows where female to male ratio in the general population is higher due to higher deaths of men in the armed conflict. However, more generally, this shows the need to assess vulnerability in gendered terms in all disasters and humanitarian situations.

As the discourse on gender has evolved within the disaster field, feminist theorizing has called for a nuanced approach to gender that takes into account not only women's vulnerability but also their capacities and highlights the need to understand their experience in intersection with class and ethnicity (Fordham, 2003) (Enarson & Morrow, 1997). They also emphasise the need to understand women's experience not just as victims but also as active agents constructing their own reality (Fordham 2004). Fordham and Ketteridge (1998) advocate for the use of gendered analysis without a stereotypical understanding of women needs and actions in disasters.

To sum up, the social vulnerability approach (of which the feminist critique is a part) and political economy perspective, argued that vulnerability in itself was a social construct and a result of the prevailing social order and its ideologies, the principal components of which were the inequities of gender, class, and caste. The extent to which societies were equitable or not, and the nature of governance – its capacities to deal with structural inequities and their root causes, which constructed and distributed these vulnerabilities and capacities in differential ways – both contributed to the making of disasters. In short, the political economy of governance itself contributes to the construction of disaster, as well as lessening or increasing disaster effects. The nature of governance is therefore approached in a more critical way in the social vulnerability paradigm; the extent to which governance uphold the rights of vulnerable sections so as to make society less inequitable, is one of the central themes of this paradigm. Unlike the natural hazards paradigm, which focuses on a governance agenda that works through technocratic rationality, this paradigm can be considered to be the initiator of a rights based approach or one that makes the entitlement perspective central to an analysis of the making of disasters (Pelling, 2003).

2.4.3 The political ecology paradigm, governance and rights

While the political ecology paradigm has much in common with the social vulnerability approach discussed above, I treat it separately as it gives much attention to the question of ecology, environment and societal relations between them.

An advocate of the political ecology paradigm within disaster theory, Oliver Smith borrows from ecological anthropology and builds upon some of the insights of Ingold and his critique of the notion of 'adaptation'. Within anthropology, Ingold (1996) has criticized this nature/culture dualism through a discussion of the primitive hunter forager categories used by evolutionary theorists. Ingold has thus destabilized the dualistic determinism upon

which evolutionary theory depends: that is one in which culture is represented as causing the evolutionary break of humanity from nature. Ingold questions Western representations of the 'primitive hunter forager' in non western societies, as made by human evolutionary ecology and human evolutionary psychology both of which suggest that the practices of an 'optimum hunter forager' within an ecology of maximizing choices was a result of the natural selection process at work: leading to human adaptations of particular kinds as suggested through the Darwinian theory of human evolution. Questioning these explanations, Ingold posited that the problem of these perspectives was that their representations were a result of their separating out the hunter gatherer as a figure at the 'boundary' between nature and culture and that these theorizations had focused on 'adaptation' rather than 'adaptive behaviour', since the latter implied a 'conscious' human agency at work, rather than a humanity simply subject to nature's laws of progression. Critiquing the western models of such depictions, Ingold argued that an evolutionary science imbued with images of hunting and gathering denied hunters and gatherers autonomy; it therefore needed to be replaced by another perspective on the relation between humans and nature. Ingold thus argues for a reconceptualization of the nature-culture dualism and against the uncritical use of the notion of 'adaptation' by suggesting the need to "ground human intention and action within the context of an ongoing and mutually constitutive engagement between people and their environments": thus questioning the Darwinian explanatory paradigm and evolutionary theory (Ingold, 1996 p. 26).

Oliver Smith, after Ingold, also emphasises the need to situate disasters in the societal-environmental relations and maintains:

"Disasters occur in societies, not in nature ... and that mutually constitutive relationship is not simply given, but is an active, evolving set of interactive process. In that sense, disasters do not inhere in societies; they inhere in societal-environmental relations. But societal-environmental relations are not relations between two separate entities, but between two mutually constitutive entities" (Oliver-Smith, 1998 p. 186).

Further, bringing the political economy dimension into this ecological perspective, Oliver Smith suggests that disasters are a result "of a historically produced pattern of 'vulnerability,' evidenced in the location, infrastructure, socio-political organization, production and distribution systems, and ideology of a society. A society's pattern of vulnerability is a core element of a disaster" (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 2002 p 3). This

means that the distribution of the adaptive strategies and capacities to disasters also show the distribution of the power within a social structure, as well as the resources they are able to command for their recovery. Class, gender, age, caste, occupations, patterns of conflict and cooperation show the prevalent social, economic and cultural differentiation within societal structures and shape their relations with the larger structures such as the state and their ability to influence and access resources for recovery (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 2002).

Like Blaikie et al (1994) and Wisner et al (2004), Oliver Smith also argues that differences in adaptive strategies and capacities can be understood as the result of the differential ‘social vulnerability’ of the affected people. Further, Oliver Smith also directs our attention to the global and regional impacts on societies and their environments, which lead to their “co-evolution on a global scale, each influencing the others in unfamiliar ways”(Oliver-Smith, 1998 p. 193). Given the competing interpretations of disasters by different interest groups leading to competing agendas, and political organising, disaster governance itself is embroiled in the emerging tensions between statist appointed expert knowledge and local knowledge. As differential adaptive strategies and opportunities available to different people, Oliver Smith argues for a political ecology as a strategy to ground all interventions:

“A political ecology approach recognizes that the social institutional arrangements through which human beings access and alter the physical environment in their quest for sustenance and shelter are key elements in the evolution of disasters ... [it] emphasizes those structures that shape the developmental features that make the society vulnerable to both socioeconomically and environmentally generated hazards” (Oliver-Smith, 1999 p. 30)

Thus ‘governance’ for Oliver-Smith is a politically charged intervention and needs to be made in ways that recognise the linkages between different scales – local and global – and that shape the emerging patterns of societal-environmental relations in order to reduce vulnerability. Oliver-Smith’s social order and governance critique, which calls for equitable social institutional arrangements, has much in common with *that* by the social vulnerability and political economy perspective.

2.4.4 The uncertainty paradigm, governance and rights

The uncertainty paradigm had entered the disaster debate in the 1990s through the work of Rosenthal (1993) who extends the crisis paradigm of Quarantelli and Dynes by bringing in the concept of “uncertainty” as the core concept in the disaster theory.

Rosenthal et al (1993) suggests that disasters as crisis were events as well as processes that included “threat, uncertainty and urgency”(Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1993 p. 1). Rosenthal defines uncertainty as a “surprise”; one of the attributes of crisis. He also suggests that this “surprise” would always lead to contentious issues as it may be regarded “as lack of planning, as benign neglect or as information-processing deficiencies” (Rosenthal et al, 1993 p. 4).

All this leads Rosenthal to argue that there is a need to understand disasters or crisis as multiple realities: as he explains, “what is a crisis to some, may be an opportunity to others” (Rosenthal et al, 1993 p. 4). This suggestion of Rosenthal to treat disasters as opportunities is akin to disaster perspectives proposed by other theorists such as Prince (1920), Bates et al (1987) and Morrow et al (1997), whose work has shown that disasters can act as catalysts for social change. Rosenthal suggests that the “contemporary world of disasters is a complex world of linkages, chains, and processes” (Rosenthal, 1998 p. 150). From an emancipatory perspective, Rosenthal’s insight of treating disasters as complex processes is an important one, particularly, if the experienced social changes redress power imbalances in ways that increase social equities.

Rosenthal therefore advocates a process based approach towards understanding disaster, with both backward and forward linkages with development. What is needed is a dynamic model of the complex global society within which disasters take place. The so-called sudden onset of disasters can have several other causes: such as, for example, desertification, deforestation, global warming, which go beyond a territorial notion of a disaster. In this way, he calls for new thinking and action, which resonate with the “complexities of the linkages, chains, and open-ended processes of contemporary disasters” (Rosenthal, 1998 p. 153). Thus for Rosenthal, the causes of disasters are multiple as well as simultaneous. Finally, Rosenthal emphasises the subjective dimension and politicisation of disasters in contemporary society due to the variety of media accounts of disaster as against any “objective” understanding of disasters: as the subjective dimensions will affect the disaster outcomes.

Clearly, for Rosenthal, the governance link is very complex and intricate, as he is suggesting that territorial disasters may have a global linkage which may not be linear. While social orders are at stake in and through disasters, the changes in them can only be understood through a process-oriented approach as subjective dimensions would also play a role in the defining of the outcomes. However, despite this sophisticated analysis, in the final instance, Rosenthal suggests that the complexity can be unfolded, and the uncertainty overcome through a deeper knowledge of the causes of disasters, which is knowable. He suggests that crisis and gaps of uncertainty can be reduced through generating more scientific or disciplinary (social and technical) knowledge.

In the above uncertainty paradigm, crisis or disaster represents a change in the social order, but given the complexity of the change, it suggests that good governance can only be made possible when different knowledge systems cooperate: for example, organisational sociology, forecasting science, public administration working together with communication sciences, and in combination with different disciplines such as sociology and psychology, law, economics, political science, organisational studies (Rosenthal et al, 1993). Through such efforts, these theorists hope that adequate data inventories can be generated to enable policy learning and implementation for better governance, which can prevent disaster or minimize its effects.

Since the uncertainty paradigm embraces multiple origins of disaster, it has been considered as being problematic from a research or interventionist perspective because it is too cumbersome (Perry, 1998). Further, Rosenthal's uncertainty paradigm with its multiple origins analysis does not adopt any privileged emancipatory standpoint or vantage point from which to critique the disaster as a product of social vulnerability, political economy or political ecology. This lack of emancipatory perspective, therefore, can cause the uncertainty paradigm to be used potentially in contradictory ways: when used from an emancipatory perspective, it could be used to argue for a more reflexive and process based way of engaging with disasters and indeed add to the social vulnerability perspective, but it can also make their approach to social reality messy and non linear. For example, the feminist perspective which argues for an analysis of the intersection of race, class, and caste in understanding disaster effects is an example of such a messy approach to social reality: an issue emphasised by Brown (2002) earlier by calling for a need to understand and relate to individuals as internally complex beings.

On the other hand, notwithstanding its proposal for the need for process based disaster recovery interventions, the uncertainty critique could, as Perry suggests, potentially lead to a governance aporia, or, as Hewitt suggests, align itself with interventions that exclude social understanding in the making of disasters and propose a disciplinary/technical approach to knowledge generation as a solution,. Rosenthal's conclusion that the generation of adequate knowledge and data inventories would prevent disasters, notwithstanding the complexity of linkages, could be critiqued for suggesting solutions which have at their basis what Hewitt calls 'general principles and abstractions'. Hewitt therefore contends that "One must question how far uncertainty is the appropriate factor for social understanding." (Hewitt, 1998 p. 80)

2.4.5 Some reflections on the four paradigms from governmentality and rights perspective

So what does the governance and its links with social order, the corresponding absence or presence of rights in the four disaster paradigms discussed above suggest from the perspective of our earlier discussions on critique of governmentality, modernity and rights?

Firstly, the natural hazards and social behavioural paradigms which exclude rights and equity discourse from disaster governance, do so, as Hewitt argues, by excluding the dimension of social vulnerability. Further the uncertainty paradigm, when used in ways that lack an emancipatory approach may, as Hewitt argues, potentially support, a governmentality that depends on technocratic rationality, which upholds command and control strategies by government at the cost of responding to the inequity that is the root cause of disasters. In this analysis, the natural hazards, and uncertainty approaches (when lacking an emancipatory standpoint) can be seen to be colluding with a societal pattern that produces disasters in the first place by excluding the issue of social vulnerability from its analysis.

Secondly, as discussed above, rights discourse is included from an emancipatory perspective in the social vulnerability, political economy and political ecology paradigms. All these paradigms have an emancipatory interest in the reduction of social vulnerability through public policies, laws and social action which will reduce inequities of class, caste, or gender amongst others or address these root causes of disasters. When the uncertainty paradigm is used from an emancipatory perspective, it adds to these perspectives by insisting on an analysis of a complex social reality and on a process based approach to

reduce disaster risks, or by emphasising the need to approach and understand disasters as complex processes, which could offer an opportunity for social change: that is, for eliminating social inequality. When included in this way, as analysts and promoters of emancipatory interests, of reducing or eliminating social vulnerabilities the uncertainty, social vulnerability and political ecology/economy paradigms discussed above can be treated as part of a broader approach: namely, the social vulnerability approach to disasters. I use the notion of social vulnerability approach in the rest of the theoretical framework and the thesis as incorporating these three approaches (social vulnerability, political economy and political ecology) and a use of the uncertainty approach which will promote an emancipatory agenda.

Given the emancipatory interests of this social vulnerability approach, the current advocacy for a human rights approach to disasters comes from those who uphold the political economy and social vulnerability critiques. Wisner for example, argues for a “human right to protection from avoidable harm in extreme natural events” that would mobilise a political will across nations by agreeing on “standards of responsibility by national-states towards their citizens in the form of treaties, covenants and other agreements” (Wisner, 2003 p. 51). It is the advocates of this approach that call for a need for the adoption of a legally binding framework or convention which builds upon the outputs from the world conference on disaster risk reduction in 2005 in Kobe, Japan, which led to the adoption of the Hyogo framework for action 2005-2015 by representatives of nation states and civil societies (Wisner & Fordham, 2005). This perspective hopes that a framework which includes rights and entitlements will be able to deal with inequities, making states accountable for reducing the effects of disasters. Here, Twigg too suggests that the presence of legal rights instituted by the state and an awareness and realisation of those rights by communities can contribute towards community resilience to disasters (Twigg, August 2007).

To the extent that the emancipatory interests of the social vulnerability perspective are based on reducing class, caste, race, gender and other inequities, they mobilise notions of human rights, such as the right to equality or the right to life, as part of their general discourse, and thus as ways to reduce disaster risks. In the process, they emphasise entitlements, state accountability and social action to promote these rights. To the extent that a social vulnerability approach mobilises the modern tradition of human rights and their enforcement through a governmental apparatus, it has to bear the fruits as well as the

burden of the critique of human rights, modernity and governmentality as argued in the earlier section. Put squarely, the larger question, therefore, is how might the earlier critique of human rights, modernity and governmentality have a bearing on a social vulnerability approach?

This theoretical framework argues that taking the critique of human rights, modernity and governmentality *seriously* is to critically assess and explore rights in disasters beyond the trajectories of modernity and governmentality. This suggests, as the second section of this chapter has argued, the need to understand *rights* discourse beyond its ties with governmentality. This calls for a shift in the epistemological basis through which the making of the disaster is understood in relation to rights. It suggests that the social vulnerability approach make a critical assessment of the production of rights in the context of disasters.

In the next section, I discuss the implication of undertaking of such a critical assessment of rights in the context of disasters in India. In particular it shows the importance of the need to include in the analysis a complex terrain of rights: that is, an analysis of the governmentality of rights, and terrains beyond governmentality through notions of rights informed by a subaltern critique and an understanding of moral economy structures and the ways in which rights are constructed.

2.5 Critique of rights and modernity in the making of post-colonial India and disasters: implications for a critical assessment of rights

2.5.1 The placing of the non-modern in the modern

India's independence in 1947 from the British led to its inheritance of a large government machinery, a plethora of laws and a judiciary. Further, the nature of Indian modernity on the eve of its independence became a part of the larger contested vision of a future India amongst its political elite. On one hand was Gandhi whose vision of new independent India was far removed from the ideals of modernity²⁴, on the other hand was Nehru, India's first Prime Minister whose dream was to develop a "modern" India. With Gandhi's death in 1948, the Nehruvian vision of modern India became the dominant paradigm of development for India.

²⁴ I discuss Gandhi and his political critique of modernity in my first empirical chapter "Rights and governmentality: famine responses in colonial India".

Nehru's political vision of India's modernity included notions of progress, the elimination of poverty through economic development in the form of large scale industrialization, and a transformation of "backward" villages for the new era of agricultural modernization. Following the ideal of a mixed economy, which combined private capital along with public sector investments, the Nehruvian era through its five year plans instituted the modernisation of Indian agriculture, central to which was the building of large scale fertilizer plants. Nehru, for example argues that the new industrialization would help India become modern. Nehru proclaims:

"Today, there is the powerful impact of the industrialized West, and India herself is becoming rapidly an industrial nation absorbing science and technology ... In doing so she will shed many of her superstitions and past practices and develop a new dynamism, as indeed she is doing today. But I doubt very much if this change will result in her losing her individuality, which has been her traditional feature throughout her history"(Nehru, 1998 p. 189).

While Nehru wanted India to become modern – to shed several "superstitious" practices - he also wanted India to retain her individuality. Thomas Pantham argues that Nehru's vision of modern India was a not a blind commitment to the rationality of science and technology, and not at the cost of democratic politics (Pantham, 1998). Nehru's nationalism encompassed a commitment to civil and political rights as also to economic, social and cultural rights as Nehru suggests "We have been too powerfully influenced by the poverty and economic backwardness of India to think of political changes only" (Nehru, 1998 p. 191).

Nehruvian modernisation strategy was two-fold: that is, it involved both political as well as economic institutionalisation through government machinery. The aim was to govern the populations through a plethora of rural development programmes, education and health programmes, and by the enforcements of acts in relation to agrarian land reforms and the abolition of untouchability. All these were methods of institutionalizing constitutional rights: namely the civil, political and social, economic and cultural rights discussed in the third section. The institutionalization of Panchayati Raj²⁵ institutions – through the "decentralization of authority and giving of greater power and resources to the village organisations" was a process of deepening democracy (Nehru, 1998 p. 191). This

²⁵ Panchayati Raj refers to idea of 'panchayats' or village councils which have the mandate of governing the village affairs and its development.

modernisation of India has continued to date and the opening up of the economy in 1991 is now integrating India with the global markets and capital (Prakash, 2009).

This Nehruvian model of modernity and its continuation through the globalisation processes has been critiqued by subaltern studies scholars who suggest that the idea of modern, in the context of India, produces a moral dilemma, as though there were some group of “people or practices or concepts” called “*nonmodern*” or “*premodern*” (Chakrabarty, 2002 p. xix). This raises specific questions in the context of India as Chakrabarty asks “How do we, for instance, characterize the intellectual worlds of the peasant and the subaltern classes who are our contemporaries yet whose life practices constantly challenge our “modern” distinctions between the secular and the sacred, between the feudal and the capitalist, between the nonrational and the rational?” (Chakrabarty, 2002 p. xx) To take this further, how do we characterise the worlds of those whose notions of rights *may not always* be decidedly modern? What place do we give to the moral economy or the subaltern world in our research which seeks to understand the making of disasters through the lenses of rights and entitlements?

2.5.2 The moral economy and the subaltern

The notion of moral economy suggests that socio-economic structures are affected by morality, conventions, norms and values: that is normative structures existing in society. They are part of the normative structures because they inform the perceptions of what is acceptable. In this sense socio-economic relations “are no exception, indeed they are structured by moral-economic norms about rights, entitlements, responsibilities and appropriate behaviour” (Sayer, 2004 p. 3). In places where subsistence economy is still predominant, as in our researched villages, the moral economy – the social arrangements – rights and obligations are informed by the subsistence ethic²⁶ (Scott, 1976). Indeed, disasters occur at the times when subsistence is stretched and an inclusion of moral economy in this study also becomes important from that perspective. However, as discursive constructions these normative structures are also a pursuit of self-interest and power. Thus normative structures or the moral economy may not always advance the emancipatory or the progressive politics of the subaltern classes or the marginalised and may at times sustain the status quo. For example, as Kabeer shows, moral economy may

²⁶ By subsistence ethic I refer to those contexts where practices and decisions are led by basic subsistence needs rather than surplus accumulation.

also entail notions of rights and obligations arising out of unequal or hierarchical social relations as in the case of a patriarchal household (Kabeer, 2002). I therefore distinguish between notions of rights and obligations arising out of the moral economy and the critique of those notions and modernity as advanced by subaltern politics.

The concept of subaltern classes as used by subaltern studies represents an “agency of change” (Spivak, 1988 p. 3) and is “a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way” (Guha, 1988 p. 35). This means that although subordinated, the subaltern classes actively construct their worlds, are politicised and construct critiques of the world around them. In this thesis, I use the concept of subaltern classes as a contextually sensitive, and not an ascribed, concept to denote the active voice of the *excluded* groups, depending upon their positionality in the social relations at stake. I use the active voice of the socially excluded group as a key marker of the subaltern voice, following Boaventura de Sousa Santos who refers to the counter-hegemonic practices and their resistances to social exclusion by subaltern cosmopolitanism. Santos et al argues that “subaltern cosmopolitanism, with its emphasis on social inclusion, is therefore of an oppositional variety”(Santos & Rodriguez-Garavito, 2005 p. 14). Thus, for example, an impoverished landed person who migrates to urban areas in search of labour work after a disaster, by his very status would become a voice of a subaltern in the city²⁷. Similarly, a complex play of identities, such as that of gender, class and caste may defy a singular or an easy description of a subaltern voice along only one axis of oppression and exclusion²⁸. A counter-hegemonic discourse of what is ‘right and wrong’ by excluded groups of former untouchables acts as a critique of the ways of living of the dominant castes in the village constitutes the politics of the subaltern²⁹. An analysis of the colonial world which bases itself on a racial discourse of supremacy to legitimize oppression may call all those who

²⁷ My empirical chapter “Disasters, Social Change & the Politics for Rights” engages with migrant labourers across castes, which form the subaltern voice in a city like Delhi, having had to leave their homes in search of livelihood after floods and erosion.

²⁸ The empirical chapter on “In Heterogeneous Times: Disaster Responses in Post-Colonial India” attends to the voices of the excluded groups, their construction as well as their critique of rights.

²⁹ The empirical chapter on “Disasters, Social Natures and the Subaltern” shows how different castes grant normative agency to the River Ghagra in such a way that it also entails a moral critique of the acquisition of wealth by the upper castes. Further, broadly, while all the castes view erosion processes and the solutions to the same differently; they also share an alternative human-nature associative paradigm. Thus such an alternative paradigm forms a part of the subaltern critic to the extent that they challenge a technocratic or a scientific view of proposed solutions.

are objectified and excluded as racially differentiated persons as representatives of the subaltern voice³⁰.

Ashish Nandy one of the India's leading cultural theorists suggests a need for a public discourse that is "culturally rooted" to enable a "non-modern understanding of the civilizational encounters of our times" which could constitute the politics of the subaltern (Nandy, 1998 p. 256). Nandy suggests that the language of oppression in non-western traditions is expressed through myths: a self conscious selection of memories which rejects the modern idea of history, or a language of spirit which rejects the analytic categories of their oppressors as well as that of the modernity. Thus for example, a subaltern language which, within a mythic context, treats a river as an embodied spirit, can be decoded as a culturally rooted critique of modernity as well as of the oppressor³¹. Similarly, as Guha points out, the political assertion of their rights by the subaltern classes may take forms which are not based on constitutional or legal definitions, but which rely more upon "traditional organization of kinship and territoriality"(Guha, 1988 p. 40).

2.6 Summing up: towards a critical assessment of production of rights

A critical assessment of human rights and their inclusionary and exclusionary effects done in the earlier sections has shown how a governmentality *of* rights is produced through sovereign state power by a production of *homo sacer* in the context of disasters through modern state humanitarian response. It has shown by the same token how an oppositional politics which questions such governmentality *of* rights can be the bearer of emancipatory politics *for* rights. Building from the discussion of subalternity, such politics *for* rights may be termed as the politics of the subaltern.

Further, as Chakrabarty points out, given that the intellectual worlds of peasants and the subaltern may not always follow the modernist basis of rights but be based on different moralities, it becomes imperative that the moral dilemma posited above is attained by including the moral worlds of the peasants and the subaltern classes in this enquiry into

³⁰ The empirical chapter on disasters and colonial India engages with such subaltern voices and Gandhi to unravel and critique the 'racial' colonial discourse on disasters and rights.

³¹ The empirical chapter Disasters, Social Nature & the Subaltern engages with the varieties of constructions – modern/technocratic as well as alternative constructions of the nature/culture relation and rights – in its discussion of erosion and flood processes, which can be decoded as culturally rooted critiques of modernity.

rights. An undertaking of an assessment of rights that includes the moral economy and the social worlds of the subaltern classes, therefore, needs to find ways of analysing social worlds beyond the workings of the governmentality of rights. To do so, I borrow from Li, the concept of “governmentality’s limits” (Li, 2007 p. 17) to open up a social field of enquiry into rights, not saturated by modern notions of rights, that emerges from the moral economy of the villages studied and the world view and practices of the subaltern classes. The concept of governmentality’s limits also invites the subaltern classes to speak about their experiences and their practices in relation to the modern conceptions of rights, and understand better the politics of the governed (Coombe, 2007).

From the above, this theoretical framework thus argues for a critical interrogation or assessment of rights constructed in the following ways: Firstly, an analysis of the discourse of modern rights institutionalized by the government; or governmentality of rights; their constitutive inclusions and exclusions, their effects on the governed populations – which I call the effects of the statist conception of rights. Secondly it calls for an analysis of the normative ethics inscribed in the moral economy and the social practices constructed through them. Thirdly, it requires an analysis of the subaltern meanings or constructs of rights constituting the politics *for* rights. Together they form an analytic grid that throws light on how rights are produced in disasters by critically appraising the way in which statist notions and institutionalization of rights interact with the moral economy or subaltern notions of rights in disasters. An assessment of the production of rights made in this way could potentially enable an understanding of how rights are produced through the governmentality *of* rights and/or politics *for* rights in disasters. The social vulnerability approach with its emancipatory impulse can, through a critical assessment of the production of rights, consciously align itself with the politics *for* rights in disasters to promote social resilience to disasters.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This methodological chapter complements the theoretical framework chapter and outlines the epistemological choices made by this thesis in terms of its research methodology and methods. As suggested in the theoretical framework chapter, this thesis seeks to analyse the governmental framing of rights and their intersection with the moral economy and the subaltern constructions of rights, that is explore a social terrain beyond the governmentality of rights. This chapter shows why such an exploration needed a hermeneutic approach to the research process, the dominant methodology adopted by this thesis. It also discusses why a choice of research methods that relied predominantly on ethnographic research methods was chosen. It argues that, in order to do full justice, the research topic demanded the use of ethnographic research methods to enable an intimate exploration of people's lives and their social interactions although this thesis has also used quantitative data analysis in a very limited form. In terms of its structure, the chapter has a discussion of the research context and methodology, followed by a discussion of the research methods used for data collection and analysis.

3.2 Choice of the research context:

As this thesis is closely allied with the MICRODIS project, the choice of the research location was guided by this consideration. The villages in Bahraich were chosen by Delhi University (DU), one of the MICRODIS partners in India, based on the extent of flooding in the year 2007 in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India, of which Bahraich was one of the worst flooded districts. The choice of location of the researched villages followed a similar logic.

In Bahraich, the MICRODIS research was coordinated by Delhi University who finalised the research process to be followed in the district. I participated in the research process along with colleagues from DU in August 2008 that is, in the selection of the villages to be researched and the adaptation of the social impact quantitative survey questionnaire to the selected research sites by pre-testing the questionnaire. The social impact questionnaire used in Bahraich was developed by the MICRODIS consortium so that a common

questionnaire could be used on various sites in Asia and Europe with local adaptations. As a part of the social impact team, I participated in and contributed to the designing of the MICRODIS survey questionnaire to capture social impacts. The adaptation and finalisation of the MICRODIS research questionnaire for the Bahraich site was completed in August 2008 and it was decided that the survey will be carried out in October 2008 (University of Delhi, 2009)

The choice of villages for MICRODIS research was completed in August 2008. In Bahraich, the most affected blocks were Kaisarganj, Fakharpur, Shivpur and Mihinpurwa, all flooded by river Ghagra. In all, 173 villages were flood affected in the district in 2007. Before the selection of the villages where empirical data collection was carried out, 18 villages of these 173 villages were visited to assess the impacts of flood. Finally four villages flooded by the River Ghagra were selected to carry out the MICRODIS quantitative empirical surveys. The selection of the block and villages was done by technical considerations: such as the flow of the river and governmental interventions in the area: that is, the building of the embankment, spurs and studs to contain flooding and erosion. The selected block Fakharpur received high flow of water as it lies at the confluence of three rivers, namely Ghagra, Sharda and Sharayu. Finally four most affected flooded villages in the block were selected for inclusion in the survey, based on the discussions with district officials (University of Delhi, 2009). The four flooded villages to be researched by the MICRODIS team were Baundi, Ghagrapur, Laxmanpur and Mithapur³².

Surveys were carried out in these flooded villages from 1–15 October 2008 by the MICRODIS team. Further, qualitative field work was also carried out by the MICRODIS team during this 15 day period, which included focus group discussions – namely with groups of men, women and NGO representatives – and key informant interviews with government representatives: the district collector, tehsildar³³, village head, and a NGO representative. I took part in the surveys and also contributed to the designing and the implementation of these qualitative interviews and group discussions (See Appendix 5).

³² As noted in the first chapter, Ghagrapur, Laxmanpur and Mithapur are fictitious names given to the researched villages. The village of Baundi retains its original name.

³³ Tehsildar is in charge of a tehsil, a revenue administrative division consisting of a number of villages.

Alongside these surveys, my own PhD research tools included indepth fieldwork in the flooded village sites, and in particularly the village Ghagrapur which was flooded in 2007 as well as 2008.

Lastly, although most of my PhD fieldwork undertaken during August 2008–December 2008 was in the village of Ghagrapur, I also visited the Jeevakpur³⁴ area in Delhi in December 2008, where men from Ghagrapur migrated out to do casual work. As migration emerged as an important coping strategy during my fieldwork, I decided to understand the dynamics of migration in relation to research questions by spending time at the place of their migration, where I met some of my respondents of Ghagrapur once again after my fieldwork in their village. Since I already knew and had a rapport with them due to my long field presence in Ghagrapur, I was easily able to access the circumstances of their living in Jeevakpur; how they conducted their livelihoods and social life in Delhi.

3.3 The research process and methodology: the use of the hermeneutic tradition

The main research questions that I had posed for myself as I started my fieldwork were:

a) What is the effect of statist notions of rights or human rights discourses on disaster impacts, coping, recovery and risk reduction? b) What is the effect of the local construction of rights and obligations and/or moral economy on disaster impacts, coping, recovery and risk reduction? c) What is the intersecting effect of the statist notions of rights or human rights discourses, the moral economy, and the local construction or critique of these rights on disaster impacts, coping, recovery and risk reduction?³⁵

The researching of these questions themselves posed certain challenges in the field. Since ‘rights’ were not ‘things’ or empirical phenomena that could be observed readily, I decided to follow people’s own interpretation of their experience of coping with disasters. How did they *evaluate* their experience of coping and adaptation; and *what rights were implicated or not implicated* in those evaluations? This in turn led me to use hermeneutic epistemology as the basis of collecting and constructing my data for further analysis.

³⁴ Jeevakpur is fictitious name of the location where migrants from my researched villages stayed in Delhi.

³⁵ My own field work has changed or rather sharpened my research question and hence the difference in the use of vocabulary in the research questions as stated in the introductory chapter and as stated above when I started my field work. My initial research question had sought to understand ‘local’ rather than a subaltern notion of rights. While initially, the use of local was a useful entry point to understand the local perspectives, the collected data showed the need to distinguish between different voices within the local and hence the focus on the subaltern voice in particular in the final research questions outlined in the introduction chapter.

The hermeneutic tradition has a long history in philosophical inquiry, such as through the works of Gadamer, the student of Heidegger and one of the eminent philosophers of our times. The hermeneutic thinking which emphasises *Verstandnis* (understanding), Gadamer argues in his major philosophical work “Truth and Method” involves, for example, interpreting actions of people as in history as a instance of "Understanding ... not to be thought of so much as an action of one's subjectivity, but as the placing of oneself within a process of tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused. This is what must be expressed in hermeneutical theory" (Gadamer, 1975 p. 258). Gadamer argues that meaning of the actions can be understood not by psychological re-enactment of people's experiences but through a “process of understanding” where there is a “real fusing of horizons” that is an exchange between two different frames of culture (ibid, p. 273). Further, language is the key to such understanding as Gadamer states “Language is the middle ground in which understanding and agreement concerning the object takes places between two people” (ibid, pp. 345-346). Even in acts of translations, Gadamer says “the meaning must be preserved, but since it must be understood within a new linguistic world, it must be expressed within it in a new way. Thus every translation is at the same time an interpretation” (ibid, p. 346). Thus even translators have to bring a mutuality of understanding in the process of translation and thus engage in a hermeneutic act in relation to their texts. Gadamer suggests that in a hermeneutic inquiry an observer should enter into a dialogue with their human subjects so as to gain an insight into how they act. This dialogue is a creative process in which the observer penetrates a mode of experience different from her own which in turn enriches self knowledge of the observer as she tries to grasp the perspective of others. Understanding or *Verstandnis* is achieved through inter-subjectivity induced by language called by Gadamer “traditions”. Thus Gadamer privileges inter-subjectivity over ‘objective’ knowledge, which in turn is mediated through the cultural traditions and contexts. In this he distinguishes between ‘truth’ and ‘objective knowledge’, and suggests that a hermeneutic inquiry will uncover an existential “truth” (Gadamer 1975). Gadamer also builds upon Heidegger's notion of the ‘hermeneutic circle’ which asserts that “Any interpretation which is to contribute understanding, must already have understood what is to be interpreted”(Heidegger, 1962 p. 194). In other words, all understanding is based on some degree of pre-understanding. Gadamer argues that the hermeneutic circle is not just a method but an ontological human process mediated through language. This ontological human condition leads Gadamer to assert that hermeneutic inquiry is an encounter of understanding and truth. Gadamer states “Understanding, then,

does not consist in a technical virtuosity of ‘understanding’ everything written. Rather, it is a genuine experience, i.e an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth” (Gadamer, 1975 p. 445).

Giddens (1993) critically engages with the hermeneutic thinking espoused by Gadamer and suggests that this conception assumes that all traditions are internally cohesive or unified, which may not always be the case. Thus there may be a difference between what has been said and what has been perceived by the other. Giddens therefore argues that hermeneutics as a method can help clarify not the meaning of what is said but rather “the mediation of frames of meaning in general” (Giddens, 1993 p. 71). Following Giddens, given that my own research questions were trying to understand the mediation of two frames of the meaning of rights, namely the modernist notions of rights and those within the realm of moral economy or subaltern construction of rights, hermeneutics as a method of enquiry was deemed an appropriate methodological choice.

Giddens’s (1993) own work proposes that it is ‘interpretative schemes’ that create communicative contexts and sustain meaningful interactions, which are rooted in a ‘background knowledge’ which itself makes such an interaction intelligible to others (ibid, p. 113). Such a hermeneutic analysis also requires that, the researcher give descriptions of the actions in order to validate their authenticity, so that they are available to others who may not have directly participated. In this Giddens also differentiates between “respect for the *authenticity* of the mediated frames of meaning” from “validity of propositions about the world that are expressed as beliefs within a particular meaning-frame” (ibid, p. 152). Thus hermeneutics allows for an understanding of belief systems alien from the modernist notions of science, for example as my empirical chapter “Disasters, social natures and the subaltern” does when it discusses the beliefs of my respondents in terms of the rights of the river or of certain supernatural powers attributed to the Ghagra. Further, my field data also showed contested meanings over a key phenomenon studied in this thesis, namely in the way in which rights discourse has been constructed. For example the empirical chapter “Disasters, social change and politics for rights” studies the contestation of social rights by different caste groups given the historical caste based discriminations in India, or as my historical chapter “Rights and governmentality: famine responses in colonial India” shows the contestation in disaster rights in colonial India. The use of a hermeneutic approach has meant that such contested and disputed meanings of rights are also grasped hermeneutically in the thesis.

The hermeneutic approach to field work was also used by the noted anthropologist Clifford Geertz whereby he produced thick descriptions of the social practices and conduct of the Balinese people he studied. Geertz proposed a cultural hermeneutics which aims to interpret cultures and requires an immersion of the researcher with the culture she studies (Geertz, 2000). As a researcher is not a full member of the culture she is studying, a hermeneutic approach, according to Giddens, relies on her “mediating the description of the one in the terms of the other” (Giddens, 1993 p. 157)³⁶. Further, there is also a question of what such mediation involve in substantive terms and further still, as the research question of this thesis asks, borrowing from Giddens: “what is the connection between the hermeneutic task of the mediation of descriptions of forms of life and the technical concepts developed in social sciences”? (ibid, 1993 p. 157). Thus, the moot question for my thesis is: How can one employ sociological concepts, for example the concept of ‘rights’ or ‘caste discrimination’ or ‘power relations’ used in the empirical chapters in this thesis legitimately to describe certain behaviour or social practices of the people studied in the village Ghagrapur? What if the individuals to whom such sociological behavioural attribution is made do not agree with the academic interpretation?

Giddens approaches the question of legitimacy of descriptions from two angles. Firstly at the interactive level, the researcher/observer participates in the interaction with her fellow human subjects through *Verstandnis* as an ontological activity of all human beings. However, this is not enough in social sciences, Giddens argues, as human subjects of study bring in an already interpreted world (ibid, 1993). That is, hermeneutic thinking requires therefore an interpretation of the already interpreted world. Giddens calls this a ‘double hermeneutic’ in all social science analysis, given that human subjects which are studied are reflexive and also themselves interpret the constituted world being studied by the researcher/observer.

Giddens argues that this mediation of double hermeneutics is the basis on which all sociological knowledge is generated. The researcher understands the social world of the people she studies through for example, participant observation, interviews, and narratives, so that she can understand this social world “on the level of meaning”. The sociological

³⁶ My own position as a researcher was that of an insider as well as an outsider in the researched villages. As an Indian born and brought up in India, I shared a certain cultural tradition with my respondents, on the other hand, my being a resident of Mumbai – a metro city - as well as a receiver of higher education sufficiently distanced me from the socio-economic-political world of my respondents who lived in one of the poorest parts of Uttar Pradesh in India. I discuss my positionality in detail in a later subsection in this chapter.

concepts used to refer to certain practices or conduct, Giddens argues pick up the concepts used by the actors themselves, but also “[introduce] classes of differentiations unknown to those actors” (Giddens, 1993, pp. 159-160). This opens up the possibility of a chasm between a human subject’s interpretation and the sociological interpretation of the actions studied. The double hermeneutic is thus an active interpretive process mediating the separate frames of such meanings.

My data collection process consciously mediated such frames of interpretive meanings. For example, I explored on one hand my respondents own notions of rights through disaster narratives, interviews, unstructured conversations and usefully employed the broad principles of grounded theory as put forward by Glaser and Strauss: namely, by entering the social field with an open mind so as to understand the participants interpretation of their social world or rights (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). On the other hand, this exploration of meaning was also informed by sociological categories such as gender, caste, class and modern notions of rights as enshrined in India’s constitution. In that sense, my field work followed a double hermeneutic logic. Such was the general research process followed in and during data collection in the field.

While nascent analysis of emerging data had begun during the field work with emerging data, (which in turn also influenced the data collection processes and the questions asked), the more in-depth analytical process began only after all the open-ended interviews, disaster narratives, and unstructured conversations with my respondents were transcribed and coded, leading to the emergence of certain thematic areas which are explored in the empirical chapters.

The hermeneutic approach informed the data analysis and the writing of the empirical chapters of this thesis, as social patterns and social norms emerged in and through the themes of the research. These patterns and norms reflected the asymmetric relations of power and distribution of rights, in the social milieu that I was studying. It is here that my data analysis once again engaged with the existing sociological literature on the thematic areas that were studied using sociological concepts to describe the social practices and behaviour of my respondents. In that sense, my research process has followed from the data collection to this thesis writing stage, what is called by Giddens a double hermeneutic circle. Thus local concepts and categories used by my respondents have been described in my empirical chapters and analysed through the lenses of sociological categories, in other

words, through the interpenetration of frames of meanings. Following such a method of analysis and thesis progression does not mean that my claim to authenticity of the analysis in the empirical chapters of this thesis is made through notions of 'relativism'. Rather it is suggested that this hermeneutic engagement between local concepts and sociological concepts should allow a reader the possibility of "rational evaluation" of the same (Giddens, 1993 p. 166) based on my descriptions of the same in the empirical chapters.

Lastly, as my data collection continued in Ghagrapur and as I became familiar with its social life, politics and dynamics, I understood how heavily the modern notion of rights such as the right to equality and dignity had already infiltrated my respondents modes of expressions and interpretations of their social world, although the idioms through which they were expressed were typically local or traditional. An example of this is the subaltern critique of castes which questioned the superiority of upper castes as shown in my empirical chapter "Disasters, social change and politics for rights"; whereby caste, a traditional institution is posited in modern terms. Thus posing of one of my research question – namely that which involves understanding the intersection between modern and local/subaltern notions of rights - advances the double hermeneutic logic as shown by Anthony Giddens:

"Sociology ... deals with a universe which is already constituted within frames of meaning by social actors themselves, and reinterprets these within its own theoretical schemes, mediating ordinary and technical language. This double hermeneutic is of considerable complexity, since the connection is not merely a one-way one; there is a continual 'slippage' of the concepts constructed in sociology, whereby these are appropriated by those whose conduct they were originally coined to analyse, and hence tend to become integral features of that conduct" (ibid, p. 170)

The study of "rights" turned out to be one such sociological category that had already infiltrated the conduct and interpretation of my respondents, as Indian democracy and constitutional rights had already made their impact felt in village politics and dynamics. In that sense, making sense of my data as I waded through it was a challenge that I could only meet by maintaining a self conscious reflexivity through the entire research process. Further, as Alvesson and Skoldberg suggest, the hermeneutic interpretive research process includes dialectics between interpretation of the part and of the whole; that is the researcher constantly navigates between the totality of the interpretation as well as the "coherent whole of partial interpretations" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000 p. 61). The data collection as well as the writing of the thesis was a dialogue, wherein questions were asked

of the transcribed text and the voices in the text carefully listened to. Thus following the hermeneutic interpretation meant treating my transcribed material – open ended interviews and conversations, narratives as well as participant observation notes – as social texts. Thus, social action was read as text which in turn needed a reflexive attentiveness on my part (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000).

In the next section, I discuss this process of reflexivity maintained through the research process.

3.4 Reflexivity and positionality

My entry into and stay into the field area was aided by a local NGO, Panchasheel Trust in Bahraich which had undertaken some flood relief work in the floods of 2007. I rented a room in a non-flooded village Ranipur³⁷ which was also a local market place for the residents of the nearby villages. Ranipur and Ghagrapur were separated by the Belha Behroli embankment and were at about less than a mile from each-other. I lived in Ranipur and commuted to Ghagrapur by a cycle everyday. I also stayed overnights in Ghagrapur as I came to know its residents very well over a period of my stay in the area. In terms of basic infrastructure, although both Ranipur as well as Ghagrapur had electricity lines, for most of the times there was no electricity due to power cuts or transmission failure or faults in these villages.

I started my interaction with residents of Ghagrapur, some of whom were already staying on the embankment, having been displaced by the erosion of the River Ghagra in 2007 or at an earlier date. I started my field work by explaining the purpose of my presence in the village and my interest as a researcher in understanding their flood and erosion related experience. Further, after initial meeting with the village pradhan (head), I consciously made my first visit to the part of the village where persons from the scheduled caste resided and initiated dialogue with them about their experience with the floods. This was then followed by such visits to other parts of the village where other caste groups stayed. A frequent question asked to me in these initial meetings was about my native place, my caste, my marital status, whether I had children or not. The fact that I was a resident of Mumbai, one of the megacities of India, I think, was an advantage in this field work as it sufficiently distanced me from the socio-politics of Ghagrapur as well as the general

³⁷ Ranipur is a fictitious name given to the village.

politics in Uttar Pradesh, and thus enabled people to voice their opinions on socio-political dynamics in the village more freely as they became acquainted with me through the course of my field work. On other hand, being an Indian, and as someone born in a Hindu family, meant that in people's eyes, I necessarily had a 'caste', thus the question of my caste was of relevance to the residents of Ghagrapur.

Although born in a brahman middle class family, my own upbringing in Mumbai has been very liberal, as neither of my parents had cared much for caste based affiliations or affections in their social relations or friendships. Further, my own work with social movements and Action Aid International, had sufficiently sensitized me to the question of caste discrimination as well as caste based politics beyond textual readings of the same. Thus although I did not personally subscribe to the caste system, I had to share my brahman upper caste roots with the Ghagrapur residents, which I did with considerable discomfort whenever the question was posed to me. During the fieldwork, I also consciously broke certain social taboos of castes and religion observed by people in my researched villages, by drinking water or tea with persons from the scheduled caste and with Muslim families. Such behaviour on my part was generally understood as a city-dwellers behaviour who did not understand the rural etiquettes. Only on one occasion a brahman family did not give me water as they had seen me drinking water with a Muslim family and had commented on this to me. On the other hand, such transgressions on my part may have led to some of the residents being unclear about my real caste identity, as a few upper-caste persons refused to eat biscuits or peanuts that I carried with me during my fieldwork.

My own gender identity, gave me a distinct advantage in the way in which I was able to interact with women of my researched villages. Since the women generally followed semi-purdah in the presence of alien men or men and elders in their *pattidari* (kin from husband's family) but had no such inhibition in interacting with any other woman, I was able to initiate contacts with them without any cultural problems. This enabled me access to women's voices and in particular to the female headed households. Accessing male voices did not pose any problem as most men were willing to share their experiences with me.

Hammersley and Atkinson point out that the gender, age, ethnicity or caste of a researcher can act as a distinct advantage or disadvantage in accessing the social world of the village

persons to be studied (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989). My own above experience in the fieldwork shows that my social identity was of interest to the residents of Ghagrapur and did have an effect on the way in which I organised my field work. I tried to access the social world of Ghagrapur by manoeuvring my way through the set of impressions that my ascribed identity of an upper-caste Hindu woman researcher generated amongst the residents of Ghagrapur.

Culturally speaking, the norm in the village was to meet and greet strangers or outsiders in the *veranda* or the outer courtyard of their houses which was fenced with a local material. A cot was kept in the *veranda* where the visitor would be asked to sit. Often two three houses would share a common fence and a compound with each house inhabited by adult married sons their families, and their parents. Thus a compound consisted of *pattidari* relations with strong kinship ties. Thus most of my interviews were conducted in the *veranda* with men or women. This meant that a total privacy in any of my interviews or conversations was practically impossible and all interviews inevitably led to other kinship persons joining in the conversations. Although lack of privacy may have led to the censoring of information perceived as sensitive, such open conversations which were sometimes joined by other household members, in my view, also added to the authenticity of many other information gathered: that is, they acted as to triangulate the information sought on that household. It also gave me a crucial insight into the way in which households and kinship related to each other, the way they influenced the coping strategies of the people when visited by floods or erosion.

One of the questions raised up by residents of Ghagrapur particularly in my initial days of the field work, concerned what I was going to do with the data I gathered from them. As I explained that the data was meant for research and will lead to writing about their experiences, my respondents wanted to know whether such writing would help them in particular. This was always an uncomfortable moment for me given the general condition of impoverishment of most of my respondents. I struggled with guilt to tell them that while I hoped that writing about their experiences may influence government policies and programmes in the future; I had no direct influence over government actions which could lead to a direct benefit to them. Nevertheless as most of my respondents were illiterate, I feel on hindsight that sharing their experiences and their views was an act of power for them as I found them wanting to share their experiences with me as a researcher. With hindsight I feel that many did not want to be excluded from the voices I was hearing and

collecting in the field as a researcher. For example, two of my scheduled caste respondents told me to write about their stories along with their photographs so that the larger world, they said, would know about their predicament.

Lastly, although, I was following an inductive process of data collection informed by my research questions, the disaster literature review done by me prior to my field work had suggested strong linkages between political economy, social vulnerability and people's coping capacities. Thus the social vulnerability paradigm was the starting frame for me to interrogate the links between rights and disasters, which in turn meant giving a close attention to the way in which social relations were structured in the village and how they affected the coping and recovery capacities of the people. Thus relations between gender or caste groups were closely observed as well as relations between rich and poorer families to understand the way power relations and social dynamics worked in the field area. In other words, my own positionality vis a vis the different theoretical paradigms discussed in the theoretical framework was closer to the social vulnerability approach, since it determined an analysis from an emancipatory perspective: that is, by focussing on social inequities and their reduction through public policies. This perspective could be taken as the pre-interpretive frame of my hermeneutic approach to the analysis which began with the data collection process itself. Lastly, my own positionality vis a vis the theoretical paradigms has also changed over the course of the research process as I engaged with the data analysis. One of the significant changes is the shift I have made from a "local" to the "subaltern" understanding and critique of the different theoretical paradigms.

3.5 Data collection: methods used in fieldwork

The main data collection tools used in my PhD field work follow ethnographic research methods (Hammersley and Atkinson 1989, Burgess 1991, Misztal, 2003) These ethnographic research methods included in-depth interviews and informal conversations with my key informants from Ghagrapur. More in-depth interviews were also conducted by me with key government officials at Lucknow and at Bahraich, in particular the technical personnel who dealt with floods and erosion beyond the ones done during the MICRODIS main survey between 1st-15th October 2008. I also collected disaster narratives and oral histories on flood and erosion mainly from residents of Ghagrapur but also a few from those who belonged to the villages Baundi, Mithapur and Laxmanpur and were staying on the embankment bordering on Ghagrapur. The residents of Mithapur and

Laxmanpur were displaced due to erosion by the Ghagra and in that sense had no real geographical space that they could call as their village during the time of interview. They lived as neighbours with other households from Ghagrapur who were also displaced by the river erosion and stayed on the embankment (See appendix 4: Details of respondents and other key stakeholder interviewees).

The in-depth interviews and informal conversations with my key informants, disaster narratives and oral histories about flood and erosion were taped with the knowledge and consent of my respondents. The other tool used was participant observation which played an important role in building my understanding of the village socio-political dynamics and the urgent issues faced by residents after floods and erosion.

Although I had started my field work in August 2008 with the idea of understanding the effects of the 2007 floods and erosion, Ghagrapur as well as Laxmanpur, Mithapur and Baundi were visited by severe floods in September 2008. Thus participant observation enabled me to see for myself in the first hand manner the way in which the residents coped with the floods and erosion initiated by the rising waters of the Ghagra in September 2008. The disaster narratives were collected after this event and thus captured their flood/erosion experience as well as their evaluation of such experience in vivid ways. They provided a valuable insight into the coping processes, the support mechanism mobilised as well as the role played by the government in enabling such coping.

Lastly, the use of ethnographic methods enabled me to develop “insider accounts” or an emic perspective while maintaining reflexivity (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1989, pg105). This meant a critical reading of the insider accounts and understanding its contextual production in order to understand the perspectives they advanced. Alongside the use of these above ethnographic methods, I also did limited archival search as my history chapter deals with rights in disasters during the colonial period.

I discuss these data collection methods used in my fieldwork in more depth in the following subsections.

3.5.1 Selection of key informants, in-depth interviews and informal conversations with them

The choice of my key informants for the in-depth interviews and informal conversations followed a spontaneous as well as conscious selection processes. I call the selection

process spontaneous because the key informants showed an active interest in my activities and a willingness to speak to me about their experience.

On the other hand, I was aware that I needed representatives from different social groups and so I consciously sought to interact with different caste and socio-economic groups and also paid close attention to the way in which different social groups identified and dis-identified themselves. Building upon (Lofland, 1976), Hammersley and Atkinson suggest that context be taken into account in selecting key informants through either “member-identified categories” or “observer-identified categories” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1989, p50). The member identified categories are those social categories employed by the respondents, while the observer identified categories are those employed by the researchers.

Now, in my early days of field work I observed that the primary forms of identification people had were in relation to their caste groups. Thus it was observed that the socio-political categories used by brahman and thakurs whilst discussing their relationships with others in village were in terms of ‘*Baman-thakur*’ and ‘*Sud*’ the two groups identified using colloquial ‘Awadhi’ language. This when translated into proper Hindi connotes – ‘brahman-thakurs’ as one group and ‘shudra³⁸’ as other. The brahman-thakurs are two caste groups (with a number of sub castes within them) in the villages – and identify themselves as being ‘upper castes’. The other caste groups identified themselves – also in oppositional terms to ‘brahman-thakurs’ – as one group and the rest as ‘others’. However, they did not normally use the word ‘*Sud*’, but instead identified themselves by their caste names. Going by these differentiations, my field work strategy included understanding social relations by means of identifications through caste groups: thus the need to select key informants from a variety of caste groups. Further, given the strongly entrenched gendered behaviour in all castes within the context studied, I also gave equal importance to gender in my selection of key informants. Another dimension that also had to be considered was the religion of my informants, as Muslims were a minority in the village. Although Ghagrapur had no history of communal disharmony or tension, and the Hindu and Muslim residents lived as cordial neighbours, strict food and water sharing taboos were kept between them, irrespective of their castes. Thus it became apparent to me that my informants had to be from different socio-economic strata if I were to understand the

³⁸ Shudra in the caste hierarchy refers to ‘low caste’.

village dynamics as well as capture the different nuances of experiences and voices of these social groups. This led me to select my key informants based on such considerations as well as on the degree of enthusiasm for, and interests in sharing their experiences with me.

On the issue of validity in selecting key informants, Burgess also suggests that the selection needs to be done “using the researcher’s judgement and can be used to portray aspects of the social situation”. Burgess also argues that it is important for researchers to select a “range of informants” so that different perspectives can be obtained and in order to “to avoid partial accounts of a social situation” (Burgess, 1991 p. 75). I have followed this approach in my selection so that a full range of perspectives on the issues studied could be obtained. Hammersley and Atkinson (1989 p. 106) suggest that key informant accounts can be treated as an “evidence of the perspectives of particular groups or categories of actor to which they belong” and that “important element of the theory” can be generated from the same.

In the end I conducted in-depth interviews and informal conversations with 19 key informants, which represented different social groups in the village Ghagrapur. These included five female headed households, with two belonging to scheduled castes, two to intermediate castes and one belonging to a thakur or uppercaste. Other key informants included two men and two women from scheduled castes, two women and two men from intermediate castes, two men and two women from upper castes, (with one each from thakur and brahman caste), and one Muslim woman and man. These key informants were met over several times during my field work period, thus a sustained relationship was built with all of them. The main commonality faced by all these households was that they all were affected by floods and land erosion by river Ghagra in 2007 and in 2008 during my field work. Further all of them had faced considerable impoverishment and lowering of socio-economic status as a result of these floods and erosion.

The process of interviewing my key informants through several conversations employed by me in my field work has followed what Burgess (1991 p. 101) terms “Interviews as Conversations”. In ethnographic research methods, Bryman suggests that “the boundary between an interview and a conversation is by no means clear cut” (Bryman, 2004 p. 300). As suggested by this term, although interviews were unstructured, they nevertheless proceeded with the view of obtaining knowledge about a particular issue or a social

situation based on my emerging knowledge of my studied research context. Thus Burgess (1991, p. 121) suggests that “field researchers use an unstructured approach that is based on developing conversations with informants”. Spradley describes such ethnographic interviewing as having similarities with “friendly conversation”, although they are also different from routine friendly conversations in so far as such interviewing is also guided by research questions and interests (Spradley, 1979 p. 55).

Additionally, I also did key informant interviews with government officials responsible for coordinating disaster work in the state and the district, the Relief Commissioner, Head of Irrigation and floods (both based in Lucknow), Sub Divisional Office, District Engineers Bahraich, the Block Development Officer (BDO), Pradhans and with NGO representatives, in addition to those interviewed as a part of the MICRODIS team during 1st-15th October 2008. (See Appendix 4 and 5)

3.5.2 Participant observation

The use of participant observation as a data collection tool has long been recognised in the ethnographic research process. A participant observer participates in the events as they occur naturally in the field to generate data from such social interactions. As Burgess (1991, p. 79) points out the “value of being a participant observer lies in the opportunity that is available to collect rich detailed data based on observations in natural settings”. The researcher uses these interactions to generate accounts of social situations and uses them with other accounts generated through interviewing and the narratives to reflect on and then to penetrate the social reality.

For my part, I found participant observation an invaluable tool to understand social relations and village dynamics. I spent a large part of my time during the fieldwork in Ghagrapur on the embankment interacting with residents observing, discussing with them different issues they and their village were facing. Part of my daytime was often spent sitting at a particular spot in the village where residents of Ghagrapur and in particular those from scheduled and intermediate castes often gathered for social chats and discussions. This was also a spot where spontaneous and lively debates took place on issues such as flood relief, government social security and welfare schemes and the way in which they were processed, their problems of discrimination in such schemes. This “hanging out” also enabled me to critically navigate between being an ‘insider’ and an ‘outsider’ to develop critical perspectives on issues of interests to my research (Woodward,

2008 p. 538). These discussions provided me with valuable insights into the way in which flood relief and social safety network schemes actually worked at the level of the village, giving me important cues to further interrogate them in the in-depth interviews and informal conversations with my key informants. I wrote extensive notes on these participant observations in my field diary every-day, generally done in the evenings or in the early hours of mornings before I began my time in the field. At times, I tape-recorded these conversations with the knowledge of its participants. In fact, initially, the small digital tape-recorder I used was of considerable amusement to the residents of Ghagrapur as I played back such conversations to them. In the initial days of my fieldwork, hearing their own voice back was met by considerable interests as I was asked repeatedly to play and replay back these conversations to them. As I continued with my fieldwork, my small digital tape-recorder became a more familiar sight for Ghagrapur residents as I engaged in discussions with them and sometimes taped them in their presence.

Although field notes are a traditional way of recording participant observation information, Hammersley and Atkinson (1989, p. 162) note that researchers have used tape recorders to record voiced information which can provide “a more complete, concrete, and detailed record than field notes” on important events and can be a useful supplement to the field notes. In my field work, I found listening to the parts of the tape-recorded information very useful for constructing my notes in the field diary every evening or morning before I started my field work for the day. Thus tape recording enabled me to check and validate my field notes.

The other technical device used to capture the social environment of my field area was the camera. As well as an oral record, I took photographs of the families from Ghagrapur and gave them a print. This taking and sharing of their photos was met with interest by the residents and led to some households inviting me to their houses to photograph certain social ceremonies. I happily complied and such occasions helped me to develop further intimate ties with the residents of Ghagrapur, giving me insight into their socio-cultural practices, especially since these social ceremonies included visits from the wider residents of Ghagrapur, as well as their kin from other villages. Thus participation in such events also helped me understand the social relations and dynamics within Ghagrapur by observing habits of attendance on such occasions and the reasons why some attended and others did not. Forsey lays stress on the use of participant listening as an important

ethnographic moment; and interactions in such events were useful occasions for the same (Forsey, 2010).

Thus the use of such a participant observation strategy meant that I had an active involvement in the social happenings in Ghagrapur but as an insider/outsider observer, attempting to be a “stranger” and a “friend” at the same time (Hammersley and Atkinson 1989, p. 100). They also enabled unsolicited accounts given informally which in turn revealed a wealth of knowledge on social dynamics in Ghagrapur particularly influenced by caste and gender (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1989).

Lastly, the fact flooding and erosion by Ghagra took place through unexpected rains in September 2008, whilst I was in the field area meant that I was able to observe for myself how people coped with the floods and erosion. Since the floods had led to people from Ghagrapur to live on the embankment for more than one month, given that their houses were flooded, it also provided me with an invaluable opportunity to observe as well as interact with my key informants in ways that enabled me a substantive insight into how they conducted their lives during those days as well as immediately after the floods.

3.5.3 Collecting disaster narratives and oral histories

Given that unexpected floods and erosion started in September 2008 in Bahraich when I was in the field area, I decided to collect disaster narratives from those who were affected by them, that is from people from different social groups beyond my key informants. The idea was to understand their story and the sense they made of the floods or erosion; or any other issue that they wanted to share in relation to these events. These narratives were prompted by a simple question such as “what happened”. I generally went along with the story keeping interruptions or questions to a minimum, but maintaining an empathetic listening. The other questions that I asked as their story progressed or came to an end was “why did it happen”, although some times, stories told included these dimensions in which case I did not ask a further question.

Further many older women and men who had seen many more floods and erosions in their lives shared their stories on past experiences in this story telling process. At times, I also used a prompt such as “can you tell me about your past experiences with floods, erosion or any other disaster” which led to a recitation of their earlier experiences. This led to the oral constructions of the histories of flood and erosion in the area, but also of famine which had

visited Bahraich about a century ago. The recitation of such past experiences also brought to light the respondents own biographical histories in a limited way, as they shared such experiences by talking about their childhood, the age at which they experienced the disaster, or some other major event in their life which also intersected with the disasters and what happened at that time. While all stories are works of memory, with the older men and women, I used memory recall as a way to elicit such narrative construction of their past encounters with disasters. I therefore treat narrativization as the telling of stories about the past, but also as making the past intelligible in the context of the present (Misztal, 2003). In all 45 disaster narratives were collected and interpreted. The collected narratives are of two types: micro narratives as well as macro narratives (Gergen & Gergen, 2001). Micro narratives relate to the narratization of experience of brief events such as 2007 or 2008 floods while macro narratives relate to the narratization of events over broad periods of time such as since the 1940s (some of the earliest memories of floods and erosion collected are during this period) till present.

These narratives also brought the suffering experienced by disaster more vividly to foreground, as at times the respondents broke into tears or their voices filled with emotions when performing the narrative. On such occasions, I showed my empathy through nods of acknowledgement which encouraged them to continue with their story. Paul Ricoeur suggests that narratives have temporal structures, where one thing follows the other in this sharing of the experience of self through embodied language (Ricoeur, 1986). This narrative temporality thus enables a synthesis of heterogeneous elements to be brought into the fold of the memory.

As I listened to the stories I understood how they were also an occasion for the performing of their social identities, namely those of gender and castes. This suggests as Prager states that memories are constituted through interpersonal as well as cultural repertoires available to the persons (Prager, 1998). Thus stories although personal also draw upon communal narrative resources. Later in analysing these stories, the main question I asked myself was, What were my respondents doing with their stories and what were stories doing to them? Charles Tilly the sociologist suggests that stories have capacities; they connect people, move them into action and can initiate political changes (Tilly, 2002). Further, stories communicate how the person or the protagonist of the story hold on her own during times of problems and how such resilience is enabled or not enabled by other people around her. They also communicate what imaginary communities and solidarities are mobilised

through such narrative reconstruction of their pasts in their experience with disasters. Narratives are also performative in this sense (Butler, 1997; Myszal, 2003). The narratives collected by me communicated the performance of caste and gender based identities and the way in which dominance was constructed and contested in my researched villages.

In my research which had an interest in the rights and disasters from an emancipatory perspective, the telling of these stories therefore had a particular significance as they were also a way of understanding the popular or subaltern rather than the official or dominant versions of constructions of disasters. Barbara Myszal (2003) suggests that popular memory can act as a counter memory to the official disclosures and may question the dominant versions of the constructions. Foucault's work looks at memory as possessing discursive materiality and as social products linking power and knowledge. As Foucault states the "relationship of domination ... is fixed, throughout its history, in rituals, in meticulous procedures that impose rights and obligations. It establishes marks of its power and engraves memories on things and even within bodies" (Foucault, 1977 p. 150). Myszal (2003) also suggests that popular memory can be a good way of understanding to what extent they resonate, align or dissent from the dominating or dominant discourse of the events. Thus the purpose of listening to narratives or oral histories is not as the Popular Memory Group suggests to pass a judgement on whether they are true stories or not, or on whether they are telling the truth, but rather to recognise the teller's need to be understood through the *truth of their telling* (Popular Memory Group, 1982) Thus following the Popular Memory Group, Myszal and Foucault's work; in my analysis, I paid close attention to both the consensus and contesting versions of the stories told to me about floods and erosion as well as to the social identities evoked through them. Inevitably as in other data analysis, I found caste and gender based contestations playing an important role in this narratization processes. The collected narratives displayed a politics of identity, as Hinchman and Hinchman also argue:

"politics of identity" arises, both at the level of the individual and at the level of groups, cultures and states, in which people do battle over narratives or because of narratives. Such battles often represent efforts to legitimize one particular narrative over its possible rivals by establishing its apparent "naturalness" and thereby to confirm one's self-identity and picture of reality" (Hinchman & Hinchman, 2001 p. 120)

In other words, I use narratives in my empirical chapters by situating and critically interrogating them in the context in which they were constructed, and *of* the narrative

genres they inhabit. In doing this, I am aware of the fact that I too as a researcher am imposing a narrative frame on these narratives by making a hermeneutic but also empathetic evaluation of their significance in the writing of this thesis.

3.5.4 Use of documents and archival data

Secondary data were also collected through government records of demography, disaster response plans, and relief codes as well as judicial records, such as case laws. Similarly, primary archival material and official colonial records, famine relief codes, minutes of the colonial administrators, their critics, as well as parliamentary debates were used to reconstruct the disaster rights during colonial and post-colonial period. All such documents used were treated as “social products”, that is a result of the interpretive work which had gone into its creation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1989 p. 137).

3.6 Data analysis

The data analysis was initiated during data collection phase as theoretical memos were written based on the notes and observations in the field diary and by listening to parts of tape-recorded interviews every-day. These theoretical memos acted as an aide memoir for further explorations in the field on a particular issue. For example, close attention was given to the local construction of rights, and local conceptual categories used to denote them were then further understood through a discussion of them with my key informants. Similarly the theoretical memos were also a means to reflect on the way in which modern notions of rights had penetrated both the social practices, and the field of my study during the fieldwork. I give an extract of my field diary in appendix 2. In this particular extract, written on the 5th November 2008, I have written about one of my respondent’s narration about a situation where he faces ‘*badnaami*’ (a loss of respect). I also note then, in my diary that the theme of ‘*badnaami*’ was repeatedly coming up in the discussion with my respondents. Reflecting on the relationship between *badnaami* and impacts of floods and erosion, I further note in the diary the need to investigate *badnaami* with my key informants on how it influenced caste relations, marriages, work and migration and rights in the context of floods and erosion. Thus *badnaami* as a social construct came up as a part of the moral economy in my field work which I noted as a theoretical memo and then vigorously investigated with my respondents.

The writing of these theoretical memos continued all through my data analysis process. These theoretical memos captured the shaping of the social, economic and political rights through cultural considerations and vice versa in my research context. They further kept the direction of my research alive with regard to my research questions during and after my field work by enabling an analytical, inductive and a reflexive process of data collection and analysis.

I also found the application of the broad principles of grounded theory useful as they enabled me to stay close to the emerging social reality and enabled a generation of categories from the field data during my field work and in later analysis. Particularly I found the concept of “open coding” as proposed by Strauss extremely useful “to open up” the field of enquiry into the data in a purposive way for further analysis. Strauss considers open coding to be akin to producing a “concepts that seem to fit the data”. The open coding provides leads to thinking on “issues pertaining to conditions, strategies, interactions, and consequences” (Strauss, 1987 pp. 28-29). For example, some of my open codes were “Migration”, “*Karja* or Debt”, “Social construction of Ghagra” among others. Each of these concepts which emerged through open coding was further analysed for themes by looking at the social interactions and strategies underlying situations within which these concepts had emerged. However, I too noted as my analysis continued – as does that of Hammersley and Atkinson (1989) – that theory rarely emerges in purely inductive form as suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967) but rather follows a heuristic approach more in line with hermeneutic logic.

After completion of my fieldwork in Bahraich, I returned to the UK, for the transcription and coding of all my recordings and the observed behavioural patterns and social practices. The analysis then proceeded by the way of comparing coded categories which identified behaviours and actions of my respondents through their accounts, participant observation notes and accounts generated through the interviews and disaster narratives paying close attention to the socio-economic categories to which these accounts belonged. I give an extract of my transcript of an interview with one of my key informant in appendix 3 where I code a particular information as consq-kat which stands for the consequence of *kataan* or erosion. Similarly the code consq-kat-food stands for consequences of *kataan* on food availability; while the code consq-kat-work stands for the consequences of *kataan* on work availability. Thus in this way different codes were given to the collected information for comparison. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) note the importance of paying attention to the

social group when interpretive value is attached to their accounts and interactions. The data was physically sorted and allotted to multiple coding categories when found relevant. Themes emerged through this process of sorting and immersion in the data. For example, the theme of “contestation of rights” emerged as I paid close attention to the discourse underlying the codes “Migration” or “Caste discrimination” and “Social construction of Ghagra”: which showed tensions and criticisms between caste groups and along the lines of gender. Thus the voices, actions and interactions of the social groups were examined for their similarities as well as differences so as to understand their evaluative significance. Thus my conversations with women and men from my researched area continued well beyond my field work stage through the transcribed social texts which had captured their voices and accounts.

During this process of data analysis, I also critically looked at the MICRODIS India quantitative survey to see if there were any patterns of social significance that could throw light on the emerging qualitative inferences and vice versa. I have thus used some of the quantitative findings from the MICRODIS survey to throw further light on the qualitative findings from my fieldwork. In particular the quantitative findings gave contextual insights and developed a backdrop against which some of my qualitative findings could be better understood. However, the empirical chapters and the theoretical inferences made are based predominantly on the qualitative ethnographic research methods discussed earlier in this chapter.

Finally, theoretical inferences about the statements and accounts made in the empirical chapter follow the hermeneutic dynamic of understanding the perspective generated through these accounts on their own terms but also in relation to the total social text and the social relations within which they emerged. Thus the validity of the theoretical inferences made in the empirical chapters is a result of the interplay between the indicators of the concepts and the analytic categories which follow both the inductive as well as the reflexive logic of double hermeneutics. The findings of the empirical chapters in this thesis follow this general principle of analysis.

3.7 Limitations of the research methods

The main limitation of this research is its use of ethnographic research methods including narrative analysis and a double hermeneutic methodology which makes the bias in the analysis inevitable as my own subjectivity has also shaped the analysis to an extent. Whilst

the ethnographic research methods were invaluable in understanding my research question around 'rights' which were not quantifiable, and required a culturally sensitive evaluation of the same, by the same token, the research findings may not always be generalizable, although in my empirical chapters, I have sought to compare these findings wherever possible, with the findings of other empirical studies.

Chapter 4

Rights and Governmentality: Famine responses in colonial India

4.1 Famine and rights in colonial India: an introduction

This chapter engages with the history of the emergence of rights in the domain of ‘disasters’ in India. It takes colonial British laws and practices and their institutionalisation in the context of disasters as the starting point for its investigation. During the colonial era, a vast institutionalisation of responses to disasters took place in a systematic way – particularly through famine responses across a vast territory and geographical space now called ‘India’. In that sense, the colonial famine or disaster response marked a definitive break from the pre-colonial responses of the indigenous rulers of India which were more constituted by diffused practices through networks of local rulers and rajahs. Further, the earlier rulers including the Mughal Emperors and kings responded to disasters in their kingdom as a matter of royal duty with whatever resources they had; a codification as well as institutionalization of responses and the attendant birth of a famine bureaucracy took place during the colonial rule (Ambirajan, 1976). Alternatively, during this time of British consolidation of its ‘Indian empire’ through regulated laws; the nationalist movement led by Indian National Congress also was born which engaged with the colonial ‘famine discourse’ in critical ways and later challenged the British Empire, finally leading to ‘India’s independence in 1947³⁹. In particular I examine the period between 1858 and 1947, as the British government took direct control over India from the East India Company in 1858 in a bid to consolidate its power in the country, following the Indian rebellion and mutiny in 1857 which had rocked several parts of the country. Within this period, I particularly focus on some critical periods of famine which formed the basis of the official British policy in relation to famine in India.

I start by evaluating Alex De Waal’s critical analysis of famine in colonial India and the British response to it through famine codes. De Waal suggests an ‘anti-famine’ political contract was forged between the British colonial rulers and the vast populations of the country of India. In De Waal’s words:

³⁹ See works of Naoroji (1901) and Gandhi (1909; 1917; 1919a; 1919b; 1944 and 1946)

“History is replete with successful methods of preventing famine. Common to them are versions of ‘political contract’ that impose political obligations on rulers. In the most effective anti-famine contracts, famine is a political scandal. Famine is *deterred*. The contract is enforced by throwing out a government that allows it to happen or otherwise punishing those in power ... This is where human rights re-enter the picture, as a political idiom for exercising or curtailing power” (De Waal, 1997 pp. 5-6).

De Waal builds on Amartya Sen.’s argument, which defends the relationship between the elimination of famine and democracy in his pioneering work on famine deterrence. Amartya Sen through his comparative study of China and Independent India has shown through compelling evidence that famine and civil and political freedoms are intimately related. His work shows that Independent India, because of its vibrant democratic tradition (including civil and press freedoms) has not suffered from famine deaths conversely, China, which did not enjoy these freedoms, suffered from millions of death from the famine of 1958-61 (Sen, 1982; 1983) (Kane, 1988). Sen (1983) further analyses poverty and famines in which he shows how famines have occurred as a result of entitlement failure rather than scarcity of food supply which was in abundance in Bengal during the famine of 1941-43 in British India. The work by Alex De Waal focuses on the question of whether respect for liberal rights ensures protection from famine, a claim made by Amartya Sen. He examines this claim by introducing the idea of a ‘political contract’ which is expressed through rights idioms such as “the right to food” or “the right to be free from famine” (De Waal, 1997 p. 3).

Re-examining Amartya Sen’s conclusions on colonial India, De Waal concludes that “an anti-famine contract was the price paid by Britain for maintaining imperial rule in India”. He maintains that the anti-famine contract was derived in the main through the elaboration, revisions, improvements and enforcement of the famine codes in colonial India by the British Empire in response to the nationalist agitation. I suggest that De Waal’s emphasis on the ‘anti famine contract’ between the colonial rulers and its subjects is overstated.

The British response to famine remained a contested one in a colonial India, embroiled in controversies. Debunking the British claim for its progressive response to famines, Mahatma Gandhi, took the opportunity during the great Bengal famine of 1941-43 to animate nationalist agitation, by drawing the Indian people’s attention to the ‘evils’ of the form of democracy imposed by Britain. Hitting out against the colonial explanation of the Bengal famine as being ‘lack of rains’, Gandhi contends:

“It is the fashion to blame nature for famine. Scarcity of rain is by no means a monopoly of India. In other countries, though people welcome rains, they have made themselves fairly independent of rainfall during a season or two. Here Government have used themselves and the public to the idea that famines come when there is shortage of rainfall. Had the mind been framed otherwise, they would have made adequate provisions for shortfalls. They only tinkered with the problem and naturally so. For the official world was taught to think no better. Originality there could be none in a close monopoly organization like the Government of India. It is the largest autocracy the world has known. Democracy has been reserved only for Great Britain. And when it rules and exploits millions belonging to other races, it becomes an unmitigated evil. It corrupts the whole island with the idea that such exploitation is the best thing for an enlightened democracy to do. It would be well to remember this fundamental fact, if I have correctly estimated it” (Gandhi, 1946 p. 378)

In this, Gandhi links freedom from famine with the freedom from the colonial yoke, a representation that fed into the nationalist agitation for independence by highlighting the ‘regressive’ and ‘unimaginative’ role played by the colonial rulers. I therefore suggest that Gandhi’s reaction, nationalist agitation, and Indian independence *constitute* the political backdrop against which famine discourses in the colonial era need to be located. Secondly and even more importantly, I argue in this paper that the real intentions of colonial famine discourses and practices were to effect certain forms of governance rather than to eradicate famine or famine effects per se, which when rooted, only strengthened the forms of “governmentality”: a practise of power the effect of which was to discipline the bodies of the colonized people. That is, what was furthered was a politics *of* rights when famine codes were institutionalised in India. Further, the analysis also shows how the *homo sacer* was produced, defined and redefined by the colonial government by invoking the idea of a racially inferior and different human subject that needed to be disciplined and civilized whilst institutionalizing famine response strategies through relief code laws and poor houses in India.

To summarise, my analysis suggests that the development of famine codes during the colonial times can be better understood as a sophisticated indicator of a development of the *art of governance* by the colonial regime than as, suggested by De Waal, being representative of the ‘anti-famine contract’ between the imperial rulers and their colonized subjects. The famine codes as legal instruments came into effect to give *limited* rights to relief to famine affected Indian people. The response was structured through the language of *practicable assistance* which suggested that the duty of the colonial state to its subjects during famine was not sacrosanct, but mediated through a number of practical issues of

political economy (Indian Famine Commission, 1880a; 1880b; 1898; 1901). The notion of *rights*, effected through famine responses was a function of the *colonial subject-state relationship* and was not an unqualified right. I finally show that this colonial state governmentality remained challenged at various points of time through popular resistance. My analysis will also show that it is in Gandhi's analysis of famine that British rule and its governmentality faced its strongest criticisms and challenges. Gandhi's politics, connected as it was with the aspirations and the politics of the colonized masses, or the subaltern classes, thus represented the politics *for* human rights in disasters.

4.2 Notion of governmentality and power

Earlier historians have pointed to the economic rationality involved in the British response to famine. I suggest that whilst economic rationality of minimalist spending (Davis, 2001) did play a significant role in the famine responses, it is the political rationality of famine responses and discourses that played a crucial role in their being institutionalised, as tools for governing India.

My argument works as follows: On the one hand the famine response leading to famine codes acted as a laboratory to explore how colonial subjects could be governed during 'disasters' in the period 1870-1880 finally leading to their institutionalisation through the formation of famine codes. On the other hand, the famine codes provided the colonial masters with an ideological justification for the continuation of British rule by emphasising the superior, 'modern' British rule necessary for the civilising of the Indian masses: a popular idea propagated by the British government with not only its British citizens at home but also for others abroad. Thus was formed the whole edifice of colonial responses to famine through famine codes which developed knowledge of 'colonial bodies' – the 'other' to be known – disciplined and governed through the colonizing gaze. In this way, colonial discourse also produced the *homo sacer*, the native Indian who was included as well as excluded at the same time.

In building this mode of argument, I borrow from Foucault's notion of 'governmentality' and the idea of 'discourse' implied through knowledge-power relationships. I also borrow from Edward Said whose creative application of this Foucauldian matrix of analysis led him to elaborate the idea of 'Orientalism' as a discourse of 'Others' instituted by the West (Said, 2001). I use governmentality in the Foucauldian sense as governance resulting from certain forms of knowledge developed through modern surveillance systems, with the

effect of controlling the subjects in question. For example, Foucault remarks on population statistics as such a new form of knowledge, producing what he calls a 'the science of the state' (Foucault, 1991 p. 96). Elaborating on the relation between certain forms of knowledge and art of government, Foucault states:

"Population comes to appear above all else as the ultimate end of government ... it is the population itself on which government will act either directly through large-scale campaigns, or indirectly through techniques that will make possible, without the full awareness of the people, the stimulation of birth rates, the directing of the flow of population into certain regions or activities, etc. The population now represents more the end of government ... the population is the subject of needs, of aspirations, but it is also the object in the hands of the government, aware, *vis-a-vis* the government, of what it wants, but ignorant of what is being done to it ... [this is] the birth of a new art, or at any rate of a range of absolutely new tactics and techniques" (Foucault, 1991 p. 100).

In this chapter, I elaborate on the apparatuses, techniques, statistics, and knowledge used by colonial governmentality in governing Indian populations affected by famine.

Historians and theorists, such as David Scott (1995), Partha Chatterjee (1999) have made crucial distinctions between the forms of colonial governmentality and post colonial governmentality. For David Scott, understanding colonial governmentality is about understanding the very practices and modalities through which the "lives of the colonized were constructed and organized" by means of a the colonial rationality "designed to produce effects of rule" (Scott, 1995 p. 193). That is, the very practices of colonial governmentality organize colonial life in such a way that dominance is effected. No external force is needed because the colonized people construct their discourses within the dominant discursive frameworks instituted by the colonial regimes. Dominance in that sense is given a legitimization through the practices of the colonized people themselves.

For Partha Chatterjee, the most distinctive aspect of colonial governmentality is its use of *race* as a differentiating marker, a rule of colonial difference between the colonialist and the inferior native *other* that marks that crucial divide between the two forms of governmentality. Further, race and other normalising practices of colonial regimes worked together to produce the effects of colonial dominance. Remarking on the practices of British colonial dominance in India, Chatterjee states:

"the more the logic of a modern regime of power pushed the processes of government in the direction of a rationalization of administration and the normalization of the objects of its rule, the more insistently did the issue of race

come up to emphasize the specifically colonial character of British dominance in India” (Chatterjee, 1999 p. 19).

Recent Indian historians have shown that there was a systematic objectification of the colonized Indian people by the British regime through the use of law and the building of technical apparatuses.

“Not only was the law codified and the bureaucracy rationalized, but a whole apparatus of specialized technical services was instituted in order to scientifically survey, classify, enumerate the geographical, geological, ... historical, anthropological, linguistic, economic, demographic, and epidemiological characteristics of the people ... to the extent this complex of power and knowledge was colonial, the forms of objectification and normalization of the colonized had to reproduce, within the framework of a universal knowledge, the truth of the colonial difference. ... But of all these signs, race was perhaps the most obvious mark of colonial difference” (Chatterjee, 1999 pp. 19-20) .

Building upon these discussions on governmentality, in this chapter I use colonial governmentality, as being an ensemble of practices, techniques and apparatuses that worked on and through famine discourses, by producing knowledge of the differentiated racialized native ‘other’, during times of “famine”, and thus producing the effects of rule.

4.3 Building the famine codes : governance and governmentality⁴⁰

I start with the analysis of the process of building the famine codes, and take the famine of 1876 -1878 as a key marker, which acted as a major stimulus to the formation of the first Indian Famine Commission 1880 followed by famine codes put in place in later years.

In 1876, famine was raging in several parts of India, with namely Madras and Bombay presidencies being places where famine was felt at its worst. As conditions in these and other provinces worsened, on January 5th 1877, a meeting was held in Delhi in which the famine council, namely the Viceroy Lytton, the Governors of Bombay and Madras, and Sir Richard Temple the lieutenant-Governor of Bengal and Governor-designate for Bombay and Sir John Strachey met to discuss the famine in different parts of India. In the meeting, Sir Richard Temple was nominated as the imperial delegate to the famine stricken regions of India, who would report on their conditions as well as suggest remedies for the same (Digby, 1878). As Temple started his journey, he received a brief from London and

⁴⁰ The empirical data for this chapter has been collected from historical documents and primary archival material. I have spent time in the British Library, London, reading the necessary material. I have also quoted documents related to colonial India which are now available online in digital form, as a part of House of Commons parliamentary papers collection, London.

Salisbury, the Secretary of state, that called for “necessity for the most rigid economy” so as to “prevent any loss of the lives of Her Majesty’s subjects without incurring an expenditure of public money in excess of the necessities of the case”. Further, the letter from the Government of India to Temple (which was widely circulated to all the Governors of different presidencies) also made a qualification to the general principle of universal relief such that “even for an object of such paramount importance as the preservation of life, it is obvious that there are limits which are imposed upon us by the facts with which we have to deal” (Parliamentary Papers, 1877 p. 15). And it is for the purpose of elaborating this qualifying limitation, which the Government of India had written about, that Temple focussed his energies and attention in his visits.

During his visits to the famished districts, Temple wrote minutes of his ‘inspection visits’ addressed to the Government of India, and these minutes reveal his general analysis of the situation. Based on these ideas, Temple made several recommendations to the Government of India and specifically Madras and Bombay Presidencies about administration of famine relief, implemented despite sometimes questions about them in the minds of the local district collectors. These minutes by Temple were shared with the Viceroy and his council who further communicated them to Secretary of state Salisbury in London to give an account of what the Government of India were doing about the famine situation in India at that time.

In response to famine, the Madras and Bombay Presidency had initiated famine relief works in affected areas: one of the customary measures generally undertaken during famines. Temple visited different districts as well as the famine relief works and commented on them. In a minute dated 24th January 1877, commenting on the “want of strictness” in relief measures undertaken by officials in Bombay Presidency in the Bombay Deccan famine region, Temple says:

“I apprehend also that in some places the authorities ... are attempting the task of preventing all suffering and of giving general relief to the poorer classes of the community, a task which the Government of India has in this Despatch declared itself unable to undertake. These instructions from the Government of India seem to me to render some reconsideration necessary in detail to see especially whether many persons on all the works, larger or smaller, could not be selected to be discharged, and whether some stricter check could not be imposed on admission to the works. In other words, I would say, let every person now on the works be discharged who apparently can get on for a time without such employment, and let no person in future be admitted unless there be reason to suppose that he or she is

absolutely in need and would be in danger of starvation if employment were to be refused ... I should anticipate that, if the measures recommended in this minute and in my minute of the 22nd January can be at all adopted, a considerable reduction can be effected below the estimate of expenditure, one million and a half ...” (Parliamentary Papers, 1877 p. 26)

What Temple was proposing in these minutes was, as I will show further in this discussion, the great *detailing* of the *colonized bodies* through which famine relief was to be distributed to, or withheld from those who sought it. Temple’s innovation was that he interpreted the general order of economisation of famine relief of the Government of India by suggesting ways of administering relief based on classifications of human-bodies. Not only that, Temple went on to conduct his now-infamous experiment of seeing whether people could survive on one pound of grain per day. However, through these experiments and his administrative innovation in terms of seeking and administering details of micro-management of famine relief by ordering certain knowledge about the colonial bodies by the way of classification and detailing of human bodies and their behaviour during famine, Sir Richard became the chief architect of the general principles adopted later for the administration of famine relief in British India.

In order to design the classificatory system, Temple began inspecting the people who came to relief works in search of work and food. A memorandum by Dr R Harvey, an officer on famine duty, notes this detailed exercise of inspection:

“All the gangs on this road (about 7,000 persons in all) were paraded for the inspection of Sir Richard, who spent almost the whole day in inquiring into the condition of the labourers, with a view to showing the tehsildar [a revenue official in charge of a tehsil, a revenue administrative area] the principle on which the process of eliminating undeserving cases should be conducted” (Parliamentary Papers, 1877 p. 204).

In this way, several hundreds were ‘eliminated’ from work by Temple through the inspection. The main test of classification that Temple was employing was that of the degree of ‘bodily emaciation’ on the basis of which it was now to be decided whether people should get famine relief work or not. Temple, for example, remarks in his visit to the relief works undertaken in Mundanpally subdivision in Cuddapah district, Madras, that “...the labourers looked to be in good condition; and it appeared that some proportion of them must have been quite able to support themselves, for a time at least, without Government aid. Hardly any of them appeared to be in a physically reduced condition”. Similarly after an inspection visit to a charitable house in Mundunpally, where cooked

food was distributed for those who were in great need and unable to work Temple noted some of the recipients at the Mundanpalli relief house “were not yet in extreme destitution”. In fact following this rebuke by Temple on the excessive expenses in the Cuddapah district, who had employed non-emaciated people, Mr Gribble, the sub-collector for District Cuddapah decreased the total number of people on relief to 90,000 from 108,000, by eliminating those people “who were not in absolute need” (Parliamentary Papers, 1877 pp. 68-70).

Thus was institutionalised the elaborate Temple inspection tests which Temple describes in one of his minutes dated February 24th 1877:

“I desire to place on record a statement showing the approximate numbers of the relief labourers who have been carefully inspected person by person, either by me or by officers deputed by me for that purpose, with a brief general remark on the physical condition of each gang of labourers. It will appear from the abstract indexed that about 97,350 relief labourers have thus been inspected, always in the presence of a local civil officer; and that of this number the physical condition of 50,700 may be described as having been good, of 29,850 as middling and of 16,800 as indifferent ... It is my opinion that this inspection of relief labourers is a matter of great importance; by this I do not mean a cursory glance at great masses of persons, but a careful look along the lines of men, women, and children, individual by individual, drawn up and arranged by the orders of the gangmen or relief officer. In this way it is comparatively easy to detect the unfit recipients of relief, and to show the officers, by selecting specimens of the well-to-do and needy respectively, the principles which should guide them on their inspections” (ibid, p. 216).

The ‘body test’ was continued as the main principle of giving food or relief work, despite evidence suggesting the dangerous effects of these tests on the starving population. In fact Temple’s own visits suggest the danger of admitting only those people who had reached an utter state of starvation and emaciation, that is according to, the bodily criteria of inspections and tests that Temple had suggested. People who reached such a state seldom lived, and died of illnesses, resulting from body’s lowered resistance to diseases and the body’s inability to recover. The memorandum by Bernard, secretary to Temple noted that, after his visit to Madras relief camps:

“...a considerable number of women and children [were] in an emaciated and miserable condition. In the relief hospitals were being treated some hundreds who were suffering from diarrhoea, brought on or aggravated by want of food. The death-rate amongst these poor people was very high; and to some of them the relief came too late. There were some, but not many, cases of cholera; but the great majority of the fatal cases were caused by diarrhoea, which was called by the medical officers “famine diarrhoea”(ibid, pp. 42-43)

These ‘Temple’ tests were praised and thoroughly endorsed by his superiors: as indicated by a despatch to the Secretary of state Salisbury from Viceroy Lytton, who describes the tests employed by Temple in detail (Parliamentary Papers, 1877 p. 212). Amongst other Temple ‘tests’ carried out by the authorities was the reduction of wages effected through a government resolution on 1st January 1877, which gave one pound of grain as wages to be paid to the people working on the relief works, a wage far below what was prescribed by the government at that time. The then Sanitary Commissioner for Madras, Dr Cornish, objected to the reduced allowance of ration of one pound grain of grain and half an anna per diem to an adult labourer, on grounds of safety of the lives of the people doing physical exertions. However, Sir Richard Temple set aside his objections on the grounds that they were experimental. Temple maintained that the one pound of grain experiment was an “inquiry as to whether the reduced scale of wages is sufficient to enable the people to tide over the next few months without serious danger to themselves” (ibid, p. 250). Several other tests were also institutionalised by Temple such as the labour test, whereby “heavy labour” was mainly enforced on relief works with some “light tasks for weakly persons, from which able-bodied labourers should be excluded” and the distance test whereby people had to walk for considerable miles to reach the relief works (ibid, 1877 p. 294).

These several ‘Temple Tests’ of “weeding out” (as then referred to in colonial correspondence and also noted by Dr Cornish, the Sanitary Commissioner for Madras) (Digby, 1878 p. 112) of people from relief works continued and so also the belief propagated by Temple and the Government of India that the famine was being successfully combated. The truth however was sadly very different. Not surprisingly the relief works were now being called ‘test’ works in the official language itself. The tests thus led to a severe exclusion of the populations which needed urgent relief: and, all over a reduction of the number of people working on the relief test works was reported. For example, in Sholapur district of Bombay Presidency, in January there were 93,000 people, which was reduced to 48,855 (almost half) by 20th March; the decrease was attributed by the Collector, Mr Percival, to: the reduction of wages; concentration of people on works at a distance from home; the exaction or the hard labour demanded of the task work; the ability of the people to do without relief to an extent not previously believed (Parliamentary Papers, 1877). In Madras Presidency, practically all the districts went ahead with ‘weeding out’ people who were considered not so emaciated and therefore considered as not needing

any relief work at all. The number of people working on relief works fell drastically, but led to disastrous consequences in terms of increased mortalities. In the month of February, there were 52,047 more deaths in Madras in 1877 than for the same month in 1876. Similarly, there were 55,256 more deaths in March 1877 in Madras than for the same month in 1876 (see Digby, 1878 pp. 121-122). William Digby, a British Journalist, the then editor of Madras Times who personally witnessed the horrific trail of deaths during this time wrote: “the Government should know that the facts coming to my knowledge indicate a very high mortality of certain classes of the population, and that this mortality is very largely connected with the defective food supplies to the people” (Digby, 1878 pp. 123-124). Noting that the vast scale of deaths was leading to dead being left unburied or left unclaimed, Digby recounts an account of the famine death trail in March 1878 in Madras as he then went to a place, close to a river bank where unclaimed dead were buried:

“... a sickening odour rises from them. On the river bank, however, where dogs have learned to go, the graves have been scraped open in every direction, and the place is strewn with human bones. I saw about twenty skulls, every one of which belonged to a grown-up man or woman ... these are in an abominably foul state, owing to bodies out of the graves having been dragged to the water to be eaten. There were ten or twelve pariah dogs prowling about as fat as sheep, and unusually bold, and there were also vultures sailing overhead or perched on the ground ... I came upon two dogs worrying over the body of a girl about eight years old. They had newly attacked it, and had only torn one of the legs a little, but the corpse was so enormously bloated that it was only from the total length of the figure one could tell it was a child's. The sight and smell of the locality were so revolting, and the dogs so dangerous, that I did not stay to look for a second body; but I saw two skulls and a backbone which had been freshly picked” (Digby, 1878 pp 104-105)

Amidst this horrific famine death trail, Temple was introducing measures such as extensive ‘village inspections’ were to be carried out by the village heads in order to identify those people ‘deserving’ gratuitous relief, and ‘wandering’ populations.

So what were these measures by Temple achieving? Apart from the economic rationality of minimal expense, firstly, through his elaborate experiments, Temple was producing knowledge about the colonized bodies and their behaviour during famines. Secondly, simultaneously, he was developing systematic classifications of different people and a surveillance mechanism of their behaviour during famine: a method which was to be adopted by the famine codes. Indeed the Empire had reasons to feel particularly insecure during the famine, food insecurity was common in India in those days. In Bombay

Presidency in 1874, the Deccan food riots by the impoverished farming communities, which had looted the houses of the local moneylenders and their granaries, had suggested that if the perceived ‘unjustness’ of the situation was not tackled, then there could be an uprising leading to law and order problems (Deccan Riot Commission, 1876).

What is suggested here is the centrality of the strategies of ‘governmentality’ invoked through the famine responses: that is to say, “techniques and practices addressed to individual human subjects within particular, local institutions” in order to govern them politically (Gordon, 1991 p. 4). The idea of governmentality relates to the “techniques of power” or “power/knowledge” “designed to observe, monitor, shape and control the behaviour of individuals situated within a range of social and economic institutions” (ibid, pp. 3-4). For Foucault, governmentality was an art of the government that developed minute tactics and instruments which together formed a dispersed ensemble of practices and informal networks of power running through the population with the objective of maintaining the security of the state (Foucault, 1991).

Following Foucault, I suggest that the surveillance mechanism now being established through the network of famine responses was to allow the colonial state to manage the colonized people in specific ways. As I will show in the subsequent sections, the famine codes which were later drawn and adopted by the subsequent Famine Commissions and Famine Commissioners of India revised and perfected the ‘surveillance’ of the ‘colonized subjects’ through elaborated classificatory systems of the bodies of people, their modes of behaviour during times of famine in order to enable the security of colonial rule.

4.3.1 The Building of the famine codes

The Temple one pound of grain wage experiment was finally withdrawn on 21st May 1877 after widespread criticisms and sustained critique from Dr Cornish who had consistently pointed out the ‘cruelty’ involved in the same. This penal wage was withdrawn after a telegram was sent by Salisbury, the Secretary of state, on 10th May 1877 to Viceroy Lytton stating:

“Accounts reach me from many quarters expressing serious fear that insufficiency of relief food on famine works, especially in Madras, is producing diseases of exhaustion, and will end in great mortality. Matters require extreme vigilance, and if there is any real cause for apprehension, it will be better not to place too much restriction on Local Government. Our medical authorities are alarmed by accounts, official and other” (Parliamentary Papers, 1877 p. 428)

This order came in too late as a large mortality followed this famine which continued through 1877 and 1878 in Madras and Bombay Presidency as well as United Provinces, with the official estimates of the mortality being five and quarter million people at the minimum (Indian Famine Commission 1880a). The death rate was equivalent to 930.8 people per mile in the population, in Madras camps: continuation of which could wipe out the entire population. Further, the actual number of people dying in the famine could have been more, as Dr Cornish says:

“The truth is, the famine has disorganised our village establishments to such an extent that the actual numbers who have already perished will never be known. Hundreds and thousands of people have died away from their homes, have fallen down by the roadsides, and their bodies have been left to be eaten by dogs and Jackals” (Parliamentary Papers, 1877 p. 345).

As a result of this high famine mortality, the First Famine Commission headed by Richard Strachey, was appointed which gave its report in 1880. One of the briefs of the Commission, as per the despatch of the Secretary of state to the Government of India was:

“an inquiry into the results of past experience as to the best system of famine-relief, with special reference to such topics as to the size and class of relief-works, the nature of the tests to be employed, the amount of wage, the quantity of food necessary to sustain health and strength of famine-labourers...” (Indian Famine Commission, 1880a p. 1)

This first famine commission, commenting on the duty of the state to save life, said:

“It accordingly becomes a paramount duty of the state to give all *practicable* assistance to the people in time of famine, and to devote all its available resources to this end” (ibid, p. 34) (emphasis added).

It also suggested that such help was not only due during famine but also during other calamities which caused destruction and mortality: such as cyclones and great epidemics. The first famine commission also suggested that the rules and principles for administration of famine response be written down, so that they could authoritatively be applied to all parts of India. It also appended to the Commission’s report draft rules for adoption by the Government of India as a model of such codes (Indian Famine Commission, 1880b).

Although the Commission admitted that the famine response in 1877-78 was far from ideal, it accepted the Temple idea of applying ‘Tests’, and classificatory mechanisms albeit in modified form to that which Temple had originally proposed. Given the disastrous results from some of the Temple tests – such as distance tests which had essentially disabled the enfeebled population from reaching the relief works – the Commission

suggested instead that able bodied persons be given work at moderate distance. Suggesting that the one pound of grain per diem experiment of Temple had created unfavourable attitudes, the Commission suggested that food be given based on a detailed classification of the kind of work done by gender and age. However, the amount of food/wages was to reflect the continuance of the earlier overall approach put forward by Temple: that is, one informed by the principle of deterrence. Thus the Commission suggested that the tests were to be employed were “*self-acting* tests of wage and labour ... enforced to prevent the relief work from being so light or unduly attractive as to induce any to remain who are not really in want” (emphasis added) (Indian Famine Commission, 1880a p. 42)⁴¹. Clearly, a shift in discourse now can be seen with tests being ‘self-acting’; that is, such that they *induced* famine affected people to be self-regulating. An *autonomy* is now being attributed to the famine affected people: a *choice* of either doing famine work or not. Power here works not through overt coercion but through induced autonomy and through the supposed free will of the famine affected person. The modern apparatus of controlling famine affected people had finally arrived and labour was now to be carefully classified according to its bodily capability as seen by the supervisors and the work accordingly apportioned.

Other recommendations included gratuitous food relief in poor houses or relief houses. The Poor houses were “for the reception of persons, who have no homes ... unfit for employment on relief works, and for professional beggars”. Since such people were deemed to be wandering, a system of patrol was to be organised to bring such people in the poor houses (Indian Famine Commission, 1880a p 47). The main aim of poor houses was to curtail the ‘evil’ aimless wandering during famines by enforcing the residency of these ‘wanderers’ in these poor houses. What was overlooked however was that much of this wandering was neither evil nor aimless but was rather done in search of food (Arnold, 1993). Further, the poor and regimented living conditions in the poor houses meant that famine affected people did not go out to these houses. The Famine Commission notes that the experience of Northwest provinces towards poor houses opened in the famine of 1877-78 was that of repulsion, and that “repulsion was strong enough to cause many to lose their lives rather than to accept help on these terms” (Indian Famine Commission, 1880a p. 46). Given this repulsion to the poor houses, the Commission proposed a village relief and inspection system to supply gratuitous food relief to the “incapable and poor”.

⁴¹ A dissenting report was given by two commissioners, namely James Caird and H E Sullivan questioning the use of deterrence methods and distance tests in the famine works. (Indian Famine Commission, 1880a)

To sum up the recommendations, following the principles of ‘economy’, the Commission specifically argued that a ‘poor law’ along British lines in India was not needed as it would lead to a doctrine that the poor “are entitled to such relief at all times” and that the duty of the state to provide relief to the poor should not be in ordinary times but only in “exceptional seasons of difficulty” (Indian Famine Commission, 1880a p. 59). Instead, famine codes and the attendant famine relief works/tests works and poor houses were to be the main forms of famine relief in India.

These recommendations of this first Famine Commission were the basis on which provincial famine codes were devised thereafter during the 1890s to become the basis of future reliefs in different provinces in India. As an example, I outline some of main features of the United Provinces and Oudh Famine Code of 1897 (which also pertains to the researched villages and field area studied in Bahraich district in UP, then known to be a part of Oudh in the colonial period) to emphasise my suggestion that the famine codes were devised principally as the means of surveillance of, and the acquisition of knowledge about, colonized bodies. The famine codes produced a network of bureaucracy to undertake this surveillance in a systematic way.

The Oudh Famine Code of 1897 following the first Famine Commission report of 1880 puts forward a number of directives as a part of famine relief: the establishment of the test works, relief works, poor houses, and a clear classifications of human bodies on the basis of which relief was to be instituted. Examples of such classification were: ‘the able bodied’, ‘the able bodied and not used to professional labour’; able bodied but not labourers’ ‘weakly’ labour, ‘vagrants’, ‘migrants’, ‘able bodied people unwilling to work’, ‘women’, ‘children’. All those able bodied but unwilling to work were put into poor houses where they were given a penal wage and much less than what other residents of poor houses would receive. Further, the Oudh Code mandated a number of surveillance reports from the field level functionaries, such as village level ‘Patwari’⁴², to the Collector and the Commissioner for the province. The Oudh Code enforced other behaviours such as ‘compulsory residence’ on the relief work sites as well as ‘penalties’ for ‘short work’. The poor houses were to be an ‘enclosure’ and their ‘inmates’ were to be managed in a regimented way with strict rules in relation to rising in the mornings, going to latrines, eating, sleeping, and compulsory residence, and a classification of occupants by age, sex,

⁴² Patwari is a village level functionary who writes and keeps the revenue records of the village.

caste, village, occupation. The officers were to patrol the streets and pick up those who were 'wandering' around to be brought in to the poor houses. The detailed description in the Oudh Famine Code about the organisation and architecture of the poor house which was ostensibly supposed to distribute gratuitous food to its inmates suggests that the designation 'wandering' also connoted 'dangerous people', who needed 'discipline' and 'order'. On the organisation and the architecture of the poor house, the Oudh Famine Code recommends:

"The best site that can be selected for a poor-house would be ... distant about one mile from a town in which a superior officer resides so as not to be near enough to allow of illicit communication with the town, nor so far as to make supervision by the officials difficult ... It should be surrounded by an enclosure such as not to be easy to surmount, but not so formidable as to make it resemble a jail, since the authorities, for the keeping residents inside should rely not so much on the wall, as on the certainty that the patrol will catch and bring back wanderers and beggars. There should be only one entrance to the poor-house: a peon should always be on duty there to check ingress or egress" (Parliamentary Papers, 1897b p. xxix)

Thus the poor houses were designated to be jail-like in their objective of regimented surveillance but sufficient care was to be taken to see that it did not resemble the structure of a jail itself: that is to say, although people were to live the lives of confinement generally lived by jailed inmates, they should not feel so; but should they be compelled to run away, sufficient guards would be available to promptly bring them back. Again, here we see a regime of self-regulated surveillance and self-induced normalization; but also one in which punitive measures were, nonetheless, in place to deal with any resistance. Lastly in periods of famine the Oudh Famine Code gave specific surveillance powers to the police, who were to collect 'special reports' for the district collector. The special reports were to report on any 'increase in crimes which may be attributed to a general rise in prices or scarcity of food'; and on movements of people: such as 'wandering' persons, migrants or immigrants from and to their area. For this purpose they were to patrol the lanes and by-lanes of the towns and take "extra precautions for the protection of markets and all places where grain is stored, and shall place special patrols on lines of communications along which grain is carried" (Parliamentary Papers, 1897b p. xix)

The above description suggests a particular pattern of famine response and brings into visibility not only anxieties of governance during famine times, but the intricate efforts of the colonial regime to build precise but diffused networks which would enable it to monitor as well as produce a famine discourse of a particular kind. A famine discourse

which would produce a 'truth' about the colonized other impacted by the famines and food scarcities, a knowledge about how this colonized other would behave during famines and food scarcities feeding into the regime of surveillance and governance. In this way, the truth of a racialised difference as universal knowledge was affirmed through famine discourses and institutionalized famine codes. The colonial state's governmentality and dominance now simultaneously rested on the twin pillars of 'racial difference' and modern forms of 'self induced normalization' of the famine affected people. That is, the modern categories of the 'individual' and 'free will' could easily co-exist with the pre-modern categories of 'race'. The 'Other' was different and similar at the same time, a nexus between them essential to maintain and sustain hegemony and control by the colonial state.

I will return to this question, when I discuss the politics of interpretations of famine by the colonial regime.

4.3.2 Famine responses in the periods after the adoption of the famine codes

In the 1890s, different provinces came out with provincial famine codes in line with the suggestions made in the first Famine Commission report of 1880. This subsection will further discuss how the responses mobilised after the adoption of famine codes by the colonial state reflects a surveillance of the native 'other' and as such constitutes the politics *of rights*.

Famine again struck various parts of India in 1896-97 and was particularly hard felt in the Central Provinces, Northwest and Oudh, Bengal, Bombay and Madras provinces. Already between August 1896 to July 1897 mortality had risen in excess in all these provinces by 5 million as compared with the average death for previous years. Of all these excess death rates, Central province recorded more than 1.5 million; North-West and Oudh Province more than 1 million; and Bengal Province also with more than 1 million (Holderness, 1897). Thus notwithstanding the provisions of famine codes, the mortality in these provinces was very high.

The main responses to the famine were in the form of poor houses, test works, relief works and gratuitous relief on the basis of village inspections. The test works were to be started by either new works or by converting some ongoing existing works into 'test works' when the authorities believed that famine had arrived: with the strict implementation of the famine wages and conditions on such works. Once famine was declared in the area, these

works would be called 'relief works'. This experimentation on such famine relief works continued in different parts, in terms of observing the behaviour of the people in response to certain government deterrence tests. In the North-West provinces and Oudh, for example, Anthony Mc-Dowell, the Lieutenant Governor for the N.W and Oudh provinces, grouped people as 'carriers' which mostly consisted of women and children who were treated as doing light works and therefore given the wages in accordance with the code for 'weakly' people, in fact this resulted in the weakening of the healthy women and children who came to such works. Further, for diggers, a penal ration-wage, which was half of full ration, was introduced for those who were 'fined' for 'short tasks'. Following this experiment by the Northwest and Oudh provinces this mode of differential payments to carriers and diggers including the imposition of a "penal wage" were adopted almost universally in different provinces: such as Bengal and the Central Provinces (Indian Famine Commission 1898, pp. 58-68). When the number of people arriving at such works increased in-spite of these 'deterrence' tests, new 'tests' were invoked claiming that these tests had not given clear indications of famine. For example, on 15th May 1897 (when already there were considerable mortalities in the Central provinces) new tests were demanded that wage work be replaced by 'piecework'. The instructions said:

"Nothing like an adequate task has been obtained on works conducted on the task-work principle ... In practice it has occurred that numbers often flocked to the work far more rapidly than it has found possible to arrange suitable fresh employment for them or establishment to effectively supervise them. The natural result of such failure to insist on any adequate task is for the crowd to grow with almost arithmetical progression, until it is apt to generate into a mob of persons doing a minimum of work. The numbers returned on such works cannot, therefore, be always accepted as a safe measure of the amount of distress prevailing in a district" (Indian Famine Commission, 1898 p. 70)

The instructions further noted that it became:

"more than ever necessary to make sure, by an effective test, that those remaining are *bona fide* people for whom relief work is a necessity. This can be most readily ascertained by a strict test under the piece-work system, the rates being lowered to a mere subsistence wage" (ibid, pp. 70-71)

This measure became very unpopular but the district administration stuck with it on the grounds that the inefficient were now to be treated as infirm gangs and provided with very low wages meant for the 'weakly' people. This however led to dangerously low wages for several people who came to works in an already "reduced condition" (Indian Famine Commission, 1898 p 168). In Madras too the 'fine' test was instituted for 'short work',

workers sometimes earning even less than the 'minimum wages'. During this period, according to a report of Dr Hutcheson, the Sanitary Commissioner, the mean death rate had increased in 1897 to 69.34 per thousand from 49.31 in 1896 as compared to the average death rate of 33.76 per thousand over the period in 1891-95 (See Indian Famine Commission, 1898 p. 173). His report also showed that several people had died on relief works or after leaving them. In spite of increased mortalities, the Madras government had gone ahead with the classification of workers into four categories (A,B,C,D) each one representing a differential rate of rations, wages and the system of fining for less performance. The Sanitary Commissioner noted that due to an excessive fining, some of the workers had very low wages and were found to be in a deteriorating condition (See Indian Famine Commission, 1898 pp. 77-78).

The other tests, such as compulsory residence in the relief camps in Bombay presidency, also led to several thousand deaths, as the concentration of people in one place with a scarcity of food and water led to conditions for the outbreak of cholera: the disease taking its toll amongst the people already weakened by the famine. Several people preferred to starve than stay in such camps which also led to suffering and mortality (Indian Famine Commission, 1898).

Famine struck again in several parts of the country in 1899-1900, and again the deterrence and self-acting 'tests' resulted in great mortalities. In Gujarat, for example, the Chief secretary to the Government ordered the wages to be given to the people on relief work to be reduced to such an extent that the people working on them were reduced to a state of "physical deterioration": with the result that large numbers were leaving the works altogether (Indian Famine Commission, 1901 p. 24). Amongst all the provinces in the famine of 1899-1900, "relief was less successful" in Gujarat which noted the highest "mortality" (ibid, pp 147-148). The overall famine mortality was at least "one million excess deaths" with several provinces experiencing a reduction in its population in 1901, as compared to 1891 (ibid, p. 71).

The colonial government also evoked a selective understanding of 'customary practices' appropriate to their governing interests. Thus the 1901 Indian Famine Commission suggested that the sex-based distinction of wages, with women getting much lower wages on relief work, was necessary for disciplinary interests and that "in famine relief administration no avoidable step should be taken, which conflicts with the custom of the

country, or might tend to disorganize the labour market” (ibid, p. 39). The report also showed that famine had also dispossessed one fourth of the cultivators in the Bombay presidency who were unable to give the land revenue to the government, and 80 percent of its cultivators were in deep debt.

The next widespread famine in India was in 1907-08 and mainly covered the United Provinces and Oudh, where both Kharif and autumn harvests had failed after the inadequate rainfalls. Bengal, the Central Provinces and Berar were also affected to some degree. In this famine, the district of Bahraich was also very severely affected, and its effects were felt in the villages researched by this thesis. The relief was organised around the same pattern: namely, poor houses, test works, relief works and the distribution of gratuitous doles in these areas (Parliamentary Papers, 1909). I was told about the effects of this famine by Natharam, aged 70 years who had heard about the famine effects from his mother. Natharam recounted:

“My mother told me a story about a family of six sisters, all of whom died one by one in that *Akaal* (famine). There was nothing to eat. She would say: I don’t want to think about those days. When I think about it, my body trembles ... We somehow survived” (Natharam, November 2008)

Another woman Vimla, aged 65 years recounted what she had heard from her late mother in law:

“I have not seen this but have heard about the ‘*Bhukmarri*’ (*famine/dying of hunger*) from my mother-in-law. My mother-in-law use to say those days we made *roti* (Indian Bread) from the pounding of the *Khali Chilka of Gullar* (the outer layer of the trunk of local tree called Gullar). There was nothing. There was *sukha* (drought). We don’t know about it ... my mother in law use to tell me about it” (Vimla, November 2008).

Whilst there were intermittent famines after 1907-08, the next major famine was in Bengal in 1941-43 which led to 3 million deaths, despite the famine relief codes (Sen, 1983).

What the above discussion shows is the colossal effort that the colonial regime had put into working out an intricate network of institutionalised surveillance and building a systematic knowledge of the colonized other. It also shows the politics *of* famine codes and in that sense the politics *of* rights: insofar as the famine codes were the main instruments for *claims* to famine relief by the famine affected populations.

4.3.3 Responses of the people to the institutionalised famine responses:

Reports indicate that the acquiescence of people to the famine response measures of disciplining and normalizing them was by no means without protest. As early as when Temple decided to implement his experiment of reduced wages, there were protests from the workers working on the relief sites about the reduced wages and also the methods of inspection. In Bombay presidency a local organisation 'Sarvajanik Sabha' spearheaded a dissent against these methods, whereby workers actively protested. Digby notes that "the mode of selection was cruel" and quotes Sarvajanik Sabha:

"Blows and boxes are given on the chests of the labourers, and if anybody complains of the pain caused by the blows, he is rejected as infirm. The Mahratta peasantry, with all their faults, have inherited an independence of character, and do not like this idea of being examined as if they were so many cattle brought to the market. Besides, the blows given are not in many cases like the doctors gentle taps" (Digby, 1878 p. 344).

Several workers in Bombay presidency went on strike protesting against the reduced wages which led to a hurried correspondence between the Governor of Bombay, Richard Temple and the Viceroy. The Governor of Bombay was worried about the possible deaths occurring from starvation as people refused to join in relief work. Anticipating labour unrest and refusal to work following the lowering of wages the Governor of Bombay issued orders on 25th Jan 1877 directing the village officers to

"take care that no person is allowed through obstinacy to die of starvation" (parliamentary papers, 1877 p. 30).

As several thousand went on strike in Bombay Presidency demanding the re-instatement of old wages, on 12th Feb 1877, the Secretary of the state to Bombay wrote to Secretary of the Government of India:

"Some of those who are on strike are comparatively strong and robust, and able, for a time, to endure privation, but others are weakly; they appear to be acting in bodies, and in concert, and the fear is, that before the majority, who are comparatively strong, are brought to reason, some of the weakly will be reduced to a condition of great prostration. They wander about, and may die out of reach of assistance" (ibid, p. 90).

The workers of Sholapur district sent telegrams to the Viceroy describing their condition and opposing the reduction of wages:

"15,000 people, representing various sects and classes ... have requested us to lay before your Lordship their complaints. The hot season has set in. Water is very scanty. Smallpox and Cholera have broken out on the works. The reduction of

wages ... makes the daily wage quite insufficient for half food even, and has aggravated the misery” (Digby, 1878 p. 345)

However sufferings expressed in these telegrams were ignored and the Government of Bombay was asked to stay firm on its stand of not raising the wages (Parliamentary Papers 1877). As the Government of Bombay refused to increase the wages and the strike continued, the Viceroy and the Secretary of the Government of India wrote to Secretary to Government of Bombay giving its full support to the policy adopted:

“If, ... some of the more weakly should “wander about and die out of reach of assistance”, the misfortune will be much regretted, but it will throw no discredit on the Government or its officers ... the Government does not pretend ... that it can save everyone from the consequences of his own ignorance or folly” (Parliamentary Papers, 1877 p. 220).

Thus these protests did not lead to the yielding of the government to their demands. In another instance, in Hindupore taluk of Madras presidency, several hundreds of workers who had kept off work in protest of the reduced wages met Richard Temple in person on 10th Feb. 1877 when he went on an inspection visit of the relief works site but it made no difference (Parliamentary Papers, 1877).

Indeed, we have no way of knowing what happened to these people who went on protest strikes in Hindupore, Sholapur and parts of Bombay presidency; a conservative estimate of deaths due to famine in Bombay presidency during this period is put at 20,000. However all through the implementation of the famine codes, the protests took various forms of passive protests: from not going to the relief works, or poor houses, through engaging in more active forms such as strikes, to in some cases, open breaking of the law and rioting. Much of the correspondence between Viceroy Elgin and the Secretary of state George Hamilton during 1896 on the famine relief operations in India show that there were situations of grain rioting in the country and that they were kept in check through police patrolling or even police firing. In one instance the Viceroy wrote “Famine. No rain has fallen in affected tracts during past week ... Grain riot at Sholapore; Bombay police fired, killed one, wounded two” (Parliamentary Papers, 1897a p. 5).

In another instance, during the famine of 1896-97, Viceroy Elgin’s telegram to the Secretary of state George Hamilton suggests that in spite of high distress, people were not coming forward for the relief works. The Viceroy states:

“...in parts of North-West Provinces and Oudh and Central Provinces, they exhibit manifest signs of privation when first coming on relief works or into poor-houses, and everywhere great suffering exists among classes reluctant to claim Government relief till last resources exhausted” (Parliamentary papers, 1897a p. 9).

The adivasis or the ‘aboriginal tribes’ of India largely remained outside the famine relief system and the colonial officers were faced with the most stubborn resistance to their disciplinary forms of relief operations. In cases, where the adivasis responded at all to the overtures of the colonial officers, it was by setting their own terms against these otherwise ‘regimented’ forms of relief works. Mr Fuller, the Commissioner of Jabalpur division, Central province in 1897 notes:

“There are certain classes of the population who have shown the greatest repugnance to resort to relief works, and have held aloof from them even in direst extremity. These in the main belong to the aboriginal tribes, the Gonds and Kols. The Gond villages in Mandla suffered very severely indeed. Yet I only came across one which sent large numbers to a work, and this was situated within half a mile of the camp ... The Gonds will work in their own, or in their own way, but will generally not submit to the novelty and the discipline of a relief work. If they are to be relieved they must be relieved in their villages and be provided with work on the spot under the control of the headman ... In the case of aboriginal people it will be necessary to grant relief in this form (village relief) with exceptional liberality as soon as signs of distress appear” (Indian famine Commission, 1898 p. 290)

With reference to the Korku tribe from Berar province, the Deputy Commissioner also reported that in order to get Korkus to do famine relief work “They relaxed the ordinary relief work rules, forebore from exacting rigid tasks, and paid a wage sufficient to support the worker and his dependants” (ibid, p. 291). Mr Arthur, the assistant collector for Satara, Bombay presidency noted that he “found the greatest reluctance among the hill people to accept gratuitous relief even in the form of grain, as they have a strong sense of self-respect” (ibid, p. 292). The Chenchus from Kurnool district, Madras presidency were offered light work in forests but that too was refused by them. Captain Nott from Hazaribagh district, Bihar, states that the people from jungles would prefer to die than come for the relief work (see ibid, p. 293-294). In general, thus, the mortalities due to famine reported amongst the tribes – remained very high. Thus the tribes of India and their refusal to participate in the famine relief methods remained an issue that the colonial government couldn’t easily wish away in their will to govern. The protests and strikes of the famine affected people and the refusal by these adivasi groups to participate in famine relief except on their own terms can also be seen as the oppositional politics of the subaltern to the famine relief codes.

4.4 Politics of famine: interpretations of famine

While the famine codes were taking active shape in India, what was the role of the colonial power at its highest level that is the British Parliament? What was the official discourse on famine at this highest colonial decision-making body? Further, what were the Indian National Congress discourse on famine which spearheaded the political campaign for India's self rule and independence and its effect on colonial rule? In this section, I will analyse the official colonial discourse and also counter-discourses on famines in India and the role they played in the governance of India.

When millions were dying due to famine in 1876, a 'spectacular' *Durbar* was held in Delhi by the Viceroy Lytton to celebrate the proclamation of Queen Victoria as the 'Empress of India', a title bestowed on her by the Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli in the British Parliament. The ceremony had included the most colossal and expensive meal and a weeklong feast for 68,000 officials and Maharajahs. And it is during this *darbar* that about 1,000,000 of her Queen Empress's subjects had died of starvation (Davis, 2004 p. 28). The idea of the *darbar* was to co-opt the local princes who had decorative 'princely' titles rather than real power and divert attention from real problems such as famine. The political response was then governed by the "strict laissez-faire approach to famine" of Viceroy Lytton – thoroughly supported by Secretary of state Salisbury and Prime Minister Disraeli – which ultimately led to famine conditions and deaths in 1876-1878 (Davis, 2004 p. 31).

Famine became an issue of considerable political importance in the British parliament from a governance perspective only after the birth of the Indian National Congress and the scalding critique by Dadabhai Naoroji which effectively had put the blame for famines in India on mis-governance and the economic drain of India by British rule. Naoroji had presented his analysis on the economic drain of India in 1878 in his 'The Poverty of India'; and had later elaborated it in several forums in India as well as England. His ideas got a public platform after the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885. A comprehensive indictment of the British policy was presented by Naoroji in 1901, which not only included his earlier works since 1878 and correspondences but also a fresh spurt of facts and analysis. His analysis also influenced the debates on Indian famine in the British Parliament. Influenced by Naoroji's analysis, MPs such as Samuel Smith of Flintshire had in 1888 objected to the "oppressive" salt tax and new land taxes which were to be used for the creation of a new 'famine fund' recommended by the Famine

Commission of 1880 (House of Commons, 20th Feb 1888 p. 929). Bradlaugh was another British MP from Northampton who tirelessly took up the Indian cause as well as issues of 'unjust' salt taxes and the effects of British rule and its impacts on creating famine conditions. However, Naoroji's and Indian National Congress's analyses were also bitterly disputed by other British Parliamentarians, as voiced by J.M Maclean, the MP of Oldham, who called Naoroji an "extremely ingenious statistician" who "availed himself of the slightest opportunity put in his power of setting the people of India against English influence and against English domination (House of Commons, 9th Aug 1888 p. 164) and that the:

"majority of the people were well affected towards British rule – that was to say, that they were contented with their position; they were lightly taxed, and every man had perfect freedom for himself and his property" (ibid, p. 166)

Maclean was supported by Sir Richard Temple, who after his stint as special delegate during the Madras famine of 1876-77, and as Governor of Bombay in the later years had returned to England to become an MP (Worcester, Evesham). Completely oblivious to the harm caused by him, Temple said:

"[Temple] commanded great famine relief operations in the field when millions of people were threatened, who were, however, all rescued from starvation ... We did not, however, rule India by the sword. No doubt there were battalions and cannon in the background, but in the forefront of the administration was its benevolence, its thorough trustworthiness, and the general acquiescence of the people in it. In that acquiescence consisted the main element of our strength in India, financial and other" (ibid, p. 188).

Thus the main argument by not only Maclean, but also Temple and the majority of the British parliamentarians, was that British rule was benevolent, that it had taken care of famines, and, as a result was actually liked by the Indian people: notwithstanding Naoroji's and Congress's claims.

However, as a leading Indian intellectual of his time and as a member of the Indian National Congress, Naoroji consistently lobbied in different forums in India as well as England to argue his thesis that famines, pestilence and poverty in India occurred as a result of British 'despotic' rule, which was "bleeding" India: an analysis which resonates to a large extent with the later Dependency theorists of the 1960s⁴³ although eight decades separated both these analyses. Dadabhai Naoroji argued that the "evil of the "bleeding"

⁴³ See the works of Andre Gunther Frank, Emmanuel Wallerstein.

and impoverishing drain by the foreign dominion” was the ultimate cause of famines (Naoroji, 1901 p. viii). Naoroji is here recalling the Secretary of state Salisbury’s words, made in his minute of 1875, responding to the charges of excess revenue extraction by the colonial government which argued that: “The injury is exaggerated in the case of India, where so much of the revenue is exported without a direct equivalent. As *India must be bled* the lancet should be directed to the parts where the blood is congested or at least sufficient, not to those (the agricultural people) which are *already feeble from the want of it*”. Recounting this Naoroji wrote “This was said twenty-six years ago, and those who were considered as having sufficient blood are also being brought lower and lower. The ‘want of blood’ among the agricultural population is getting so complete that famines and plagues like the present are fast bleeding the masses to death” (Naoroji, 1901 p. ix) The economic drain by Britain, Naoroji argues was the chief cause of poverty and famines in India and was a result of the ‘un-British’ rule. Naoroji further comments:

“how strange it is that the British rulers do not see that after all they themselves are the main cause of the destruction that ensues from droughts; that is the drain of India’s wealth by *them* that lays at their own door the dreadful results of misery, starvation, and deaths of millions...” (Naoroji, 1901 p. 212)

In another striking critique he says:

“This India, “bled” and exploited in every way of their wealth, of their services, of their land, labour, and all the resources by the foreigners, helpless and voiceless, governed by the arbitrary law and argument of force, and with injustice and unrighteousness – this India of the Indians becomes the “poorest” country in the world, after one hundred and fifty years of British rule, to the disgrace of the British name. The greater the drain the greater the impoverishment, resulting in all the scourges of war, famine and pestilence” (Naoroji, 1901 p. 384)

Alongside Naoroji, another study which made heavy taxation of land as the principal reason for famine was that by Romesh Dutt, an Indian civil servant and also one of the Congress Presidents, and that by Mr Rogers, a retired British civil servant (Dutt, 2005 [1900]). Around the same time, in 1898, William Digby the editor of Madras Times wrote a book highlighting the effects of famine of 1876-1877. These studies and their findings led to an intense polemical discussion of the causes of famine in India between, on the one hand, the Indian Nationalists and their sympathisers in the British Parliament led by William Wedderburn, and on the other hand, the Secretary of state, George Hamilton, and a majority of the MPs, who generally supported the official position as represented by the Secretary of state. Wedderburn, who was closely aligned with the Indian National

Congress and was the Congress president in 1889 and 1910, earned the ire of Secretary of state George Hamilton in the polemical debate which took place in the British Parliament in 1897.

Influenced by Naoroji's analysis, The Indian National Congress in its resolution on the famine of 1896-97 proclaimed:

“This congress deplores the outbreak of famine in a more or less acute form throughout India, and holds that this and other famines which have occurred in recent years are due to the great poverty of the people, brought on by the drain of the wealth of the country, which has been going on for years together, and by the excessive taxation and over assessment consequent on a policy of extravagance followed by the Government, both in the civil and the military departments, which has so far impoverished the people, that at the first touch of scarcity they are rendered helpless and must perish unless fed by the state or helped by private charity ... In the meantime the congress would remind the Government of its solemn duty to save human life and mitigate human suffering (the provisions of the existing famine code being in the opinion of the congress inadequate as regards wages, rations, and oppressive as regards task work), and would appeal to the Government to redeem its pledges by restoring the famine insurance fund (keeping a separate account of it) to its original footing, and to apply it more largely to its original purpose – viz, the immediate relief of the famine-stricken people ...” (House of Commons, 26th January 1897 p. 534)

At heart of the British parliamentary debate in January 1897 were two issues: on the one hand, a response to the challenge by the Indian National Congress which had put the blame of the famine and the mortality on British rule; and, on the other, the allegation that the ‘famine fund’ created through excess taxation on the Indian population along the lines of the recommendation by the Famine Commission of 1880, was being diverted for other purposes, such as war, and not used for mitigating famine effects and the oppressive conditions of the famine codes. This resolution of the Indian National Congress and its analysis of the famine was supported by William Wedderburn (Banffshire) who lobbied for a full and independent inquiry in the Parliament into the conditions of chronic destitution of the masses which led to excessive mortality in times of famine. Wedderburn's passionate appeal to the other parliamentarians for an inquiry in famine did lead to a robust discussion on the Indian famine conditions; and was hotly contested by Secretary of state Hamilton who said that the Congress “resolution is both ungracious and ungrateful” (ibid, p. 534) adding that lack of rain was the main cause of famine and that with the famine codes, they were “much better able to combat the effects of famine now than ever before” (ibid p. 536). Led by Wedderburn, an amendment was put in the house to indict the

government over famine and famine fund; however it was defeated (House of Commons, 26th January 1897). Motivated by Wedderburn, the years 1897 -1898 also saw more of such attempts to hold the British government accountable for the famines. Mr Swift Magneill (Donegal S), moved an amendment that the House view famine, plague and pestilence in India with “grave disapproval” (House of Commons, 5th August 1897 p. 437) and argued that “Much of the money raised for the last famine was appropriated to little wars” (House of Commons, 5th August 1897 p. 439). Although all such amendments were defeated, they did provide an alternative interpretation of famine. In yet another analysis of the Indian famine of 1896-97; Samuel Smith, the MP from Flintshire, spoke about the effects of land taxation and the costs of war waged by Britain on the Afghan borders, the cost of it borne by Indian peasants and its effects on famine. Smith said “It is no exaggeration to say that for every hundred Afghans whom we have slain in this unrighteous war, we have caused a thousand of our native fellow-subjects to perish of want and hunger” (House of Commons, 22nd February 1898 p. 1388).

This critique of British famine responses by the Indian National Congress and by some British Parliamentarians was rejected throughout the debate in Parliament by Secretary of the state Lord Hamilton who maintained:

“There are two theories current as to the cause and origin of this distress. There is a small but active body of propagandists who are never tired of complaining that British rule is bleeding India but that it is the result of persistent over taxation and heavy assessment which has so reduced the condition of the mass of the people, and that they are expiring of inanition. There is another school who maintain a wholly contrary opinion. They assert that from time immemorial famine, due to want of rain, has been a regular and periodical scourge of India, and that under our rule, decade by decade, the effects of famine when it occurs are being narrowed and arrested, not only by the increased resources of the people assailed, but by a systematic and progressive scheme of famine protection which the British Government has created and is continuously improving” (House of Commons, 8th August 1899 pp. 174-175)

Further using the famine commission’s report of 1896-98 Hamilton told Parliament “That [the]report ... showed that, though here and there a mistake had been made, the campaign as a whole against famine was devised and carried through with prescience, with resource, and with success” (ibid, p. 174). Recalling the civilizing effect of British rule over India, Hamilton, countered Naoroji by following Malthusian theory of poverty:

“We are face to face with the consequences of the long establishment of the pax Britannica. India is the most prolific human nursery in the world. We have removed

or restrained all the influences by which in the past this prolific ness has been counteracted. War and Plundering are no longer permitted, and all the energy of modern science and civilisation is devoted to the arresting and stamping out of those epidemic diseases which in the past played such havoc with human life ... It is the one unnatural law of nature that when population rapidly increases, that section in which the increase is quickest is the one nearest to the brink of destitution. I am afraid that this residuum in India is expanding, and will continue rapidly to expand under our rule. We cannot reverse our past humane policy of protection of life, and we must therefore try and see how far we can otherwise ease the new economic and social difficulties we have ourselves created” (House of Commons, 8th August 1899 pp. 179-180).

Thus Hamilton suggested that it was the humane policies of the British rule, the famine codes and its benevolent rule, that had in fact arrested deaths. The saving of lives, however, led to an increase in the population of India great numbers of which ultimately died in a famine as a result of, a law of nature. This meant that, more than ever before, India needed modern British rule which alone could create new and modern economic opportunities for the Indians to counter famine effects.

At times the Indian social system was blamed for the famine effects. Sir Lewis McIver, an MP from Edinburgh W, suggested that during the famine of 1900 “...savings in good years ... are devoured by the draconic effects of the customary law with reference to marriages and other ceremonies” (House of Commons, 3rd April 1900 pp. 1095-96)

The official colonial discourse of the civilizing impacts of British rule on India, a political justification of Britain’s rule over India, was a sensitive point in the parliamentary debates, with some sympathetic British Parliamentarians using famine, and inadequate British response to it, as an indicator of the non-substantiality of such claims. Mr Souttar, MP (Dumfriesshire) had stated in one such debate:

“We have vaunted the Government of India; we have said to the nations of the world, “Come and see how Englishmen can govern Orientals,” and it seems to me that the miseries of our fellow-subjects in India to-day touch our honour, and are a blot upon the fair fame of our empire...” (House of Commons, 26th July 1900 pp. 1378-79)

All claims which made British rule accountable for famine effects were put down vehemently by the Secretary of state: for example, at one time, in 1900, Hamilton accused the Nationalists and their supporters in the parliament of “gross libel on the British Government” (House of Commons, 28th May 1900 p. 1576). Also the Famine Commission’s work effectively absolved the Government of any blame in relation to the

famine. Hamilton said “In fact, they [Famine Commissioners] were to take upon themselves as regards relieving distress a higher and wider obligation than was ever undertaken by any civilized Government in Europe” (House of Commons, 26th July 1900 p1356). Davis (2001) suggests that Famine Commission reports were generally used to create a positive impression of the government. My analysis of the British parliamentary debates too supports this view.

The Bengal famine in 1941-43 came at a time when the Indian nationalist struggle was at its peak, with Congress demanding complete independence while British Government offered a dominion status. The famine debates in the parliamentary session on 28th July 1944 also disclosed this political tension. The Malthusian view of famine along with the need for more modern growth was propped up by academics such as Prof A. V Hill of Cambridge University, who in one of the parliamentary debates in support of the official position stated:

“No doubt there are many reasons for the Bengal famine of last year, some of them real and some of them imaginary. Among the imaginary ones are attributing it to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The fundamental reason for the Bengal famine is that the factor of safety in India is almost zero, and tends to be held there all the time of excessive reproduction. Blame is thrown about for this ... in India it is customary to put the blame on the British (House of Commons, 28th July 1944 p. 1050).

Several other MPs also echoed the Malthusian view of famine, similar to that voiced by Sir Stanley Reed of Aylesbury:

“Much has been said about the famine in Bengal. If time permitted, I could prove conclusively to this House that there has been no famine in Bengal – not in the recognised Indian sense. What has happened is a symptom of the gravest economic problem any country ever had to face in its history – a colossal growth in population, without any corresponding expansion in the food supply” (ibid, p. 1102).

In this parliamentary debate, Lord Amery, the then Secretary of state for India admitted that there were more than 7 million deaths in the Bengal famine, but suggested, that what was needed was “increased efficiency” in the utilisation of India’s natural resources and the “development of new industries” “without which political independence would be little more than nominal” (ibid, p. 1115).

This general yet official British consensus view to blame the overpopulation of India for famine in Bengal, and the need for modern growth (which generally meant growth through British rule), was critiqued by the Nationalist movement, under Gandhi, who drew people's attention to the problems of modernity which, in the guise of British industry, was as Gandhi argued the "greatest evil" unleashed on Indian peasantry and as such was the major cause of famine. Modernity was not the solution, but rather a problem, according to Gandhi, and by the same yardstick, British rule not a blessing but a curse to India. Reacting to Amery's speech as well as that of other parliamentarians on Indian famine on July 28th 1944, which had emphasised that economic development was more important than the political freedom, Gandhi spoke to the Press on July 30th 1944:

"It has caused me pain as also amazement that the representatives of the British nation, who have a long and distinguished record of heroic fight for political freedom, should divorce the economic development of India from political subjection and give the former preference over the latter ... without a national government is not the economic development of India, but its exploitation and degradation".

Gandhi further emphasized:

"Members of the House of Commons, not knowing the realities in India, may philosophize and talk of the immediate importance of economic development. I wish they can see what is going on today in India. I have no shadow of doubt in my mind that the Bengal famine, as also famines in other parts of India, were man-made and not God-made ... I hold that in spite of all the honesty that the British rulers can summon to their assistance, it is impossible for them to get behind the Indian skin and know the real disease. The consensus of opinion in the House of Commons, therefore, is for me a terrible pointer. It confirms me in my opinion that the "Quit India" resolution was no hasty cry conceived in anger. To put the same in parliamentary language, it demands that India must be now governed by Indians chosen by her own people – not a coterie but the whole mass of the people without distinction of race, creed or colour" (Gandhi, 1944 pp. 252-253).

Gandhi's radical critique of modernity and its rejection of British rule – in an analysis weaving together the issues of political independence, self-sufficiency of villages and freedom from famine – offered a radically different solution to the one espoused by the colonial government. It also went further than all the other nationalist positions taken until then relating to questions of famine and calamities. In effect, it linked clearly the question of political rights of citizenship with that of economic rights and freedom from famine. Gandhi's analysis of famine and modernity was also influenced by Romesh Dutt's, writings. In *Hind Swaraj*, issued as a booklet, Gandhi stated:

“When I read Mr Dutt’s *Economic History of India*, I wept; and as I think of it again my heart sickens. It is machinery that has impoverished India. It is difficult to measure the harm that Manchester has done to us. It is due to Manchester that Indian handicraft has all but disappeared. But I make a mistake. How can Manchester be blamed? We wore Manchester cloth and this is why Manchester wove it ... Machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilization; it represents a great sin” (Gandhi, 1909 p. 303).

During the Bengal famine, Gandhi was organising peasantry to weave their own cloth for consumption and earn modest livelihoods out of it as a way to counter famine, through the swadeshi⁴⁴ movement. An uncompromising critic of modernity, as well as of practices which induced dependency on others, Gandhi worked against famine by calling people to be self-reliant through the weaving of Khadi. As early as October 1917, Gandhi had said “No well-wisher of India, no patriot dare look upon the impending destruction of the handloom weaver with equanimity ... this industry used to supply the peasant with an additional source of livelihood and an insurance against famine” (Gandhi, 1917 p. 26). In a speech at a women’s meeting in Surat on 26th May 1919 Gandhi said “While our own workers and craftsmen starve, we import goods from outside. What other punishment for this sin can there be, if not starvation? I have placed the swadeshi vow before the people of India to rid them of this sin ... these days famine-stricken people spin and take payment for their labour, instead of accepting free supplies of grain” (Gandhi, 1919a p. 62). Further, Gandhi linked the imposed land revenue collections by the British administration with famine effects. His *satyagraha* (meaning a non violent protest made in pursuit of truth) in Champaran, in 1917 which mobilised large segments of peasantry was against the payment of unjust land taxes in the middle of famine. Writing in *Navjivan*, 12th Oct 1919, Gandhi voiced his support of the people of Barejedi in Gujarat, who had refused to pay a collection of Rs 7,200 as a case of simple justice, by recounting their petition “We are not guilty; we have suffered from two famines; we are hardly in a position to pay the Government’s assessment”(Gandhi, 1919b p. 53). Gandhi maintained this basic structure of analysis which linked famine and food scarcity with modernity and dependency until India became free in 1947.

Gandhi’s overall analysis of famine, thus posed a fundamental critique of British rule and all the modernising claims that the colonial state made on behalf of India, justifying its rule

⁴⁴Gandhi talks of swadeshi or self rule in a more fundamental sense, about achieving sovereignty not only in political rule but also in daily affairs: that is through livelihood strategies that will produce a self-sufficient village republic, symbolised through weaving of khadi cloth and thus rejecting machine-made cloth produced in Manchester.

over her. His strategies of *satyagraha* and *swadeshi*, which linked the affirmation of political rights, social rights, and economic rights together led to a mass mobilisation on all these fronts for their simultaneous affirmation. In Gandhi, the British Raj and its governmentality had faced its harshest resistance; Gandhi's idiom of resistance, essentially anti-modern, refused as its terms for contestation, to entertain the dominant discursive frameworks of modernity as set by the official famine discourses, and in that sense remained truly outside it or rather eluded its domination.

4.5 A few concluding remarks:

In this chapter, I have traced the history of famine discourses and their construction of rights, particularly in colonial British India. In doing so, I have analysed the statist as well as subaltern constructions and critiques of rights in disaster in the context of famine in colonial India. Taking issue with De Waal (1997) who suggests that famine in colonial India was averted through the anti-famine contract as a price paid for the British regime, my analysis suggests that the British famine policy can be better understood as institutionalizing a form of governmentality which worked by creating a racialized other to be normalized, disciplined and controlled through modern surveillance practices and a bureaucratic apparatus. The racialized native other was a subject and an object of the famine discourses; her/his rights or claims to assistance from the colonial state during famine were mediated through a subject-state relationship rather than a citizen-state relationship. Thus the right to assistance from the state was a highly qualified right by the way of various tests and constructed the 'oriental other' through a network of colonial practices such as codification and surveillance of 'native' bodies, and their "behaviour"; and strategies for self-induced normalization. Such was the politics of rights played out, with the racialised native representing the production of *homo sacer* through colonial famine discourses and practices. The Indian native, the *homo sacer* was included as well as excluded from claiming famine relief as a right by instantiation of the racial difference, civilizing and normalization strategy by the colonial regime. This colonial strategy faced resistance from the colonized subjects, which ranged from overtly rebellious actions such as strikes where low famine wage work was given, to acts such as nonparticipation in the famine wage-work in tribal areas who preferred starvation and death to subjection to control and surveillance: acts which constituted the politics *for* rights by the subaltern classes.

Further, famine discourse and its attendant famine codes acted as a discursive terrain where contesting interpretations of famine were played out. While the official colonial interpretations of famine made these occasions to further their claim of modern benevolent British rule, and generally blamed the population and customary practices for famine; the Indian National Congress and sympathetic British Parliamentarians influenced by Naoroji's and Romesh Dutt's analysis suggested that famines were a result of British policies which impoverished India and drained India's wealth. The most radical critique of British policies and the most incisive analysis of famine came from Gandhi who advocating a politics *for* rights mobilised the masses against colonial rule, severely critiquing its modernizing policies, maintaining that political rights, economic rights and social rights were inter-related and could not be separated from each-other. In this analysis India's political independence, rights of the common people and freedom from famine disasters went hand in hand with each other.

In the next chapter, I discuss the disaster policies and programmes undertaken in post colonial India. The next chapter shows how the famine relief codes have influenced the social protection programmes currently undertaken, namely that of providing work during scarcities, a principle espoused but never fully and properly applied during the colonial famine periods as this chapter has shown.

Chapter 5

In Heterogeneous Times: Disaster Response in Post-colonial India

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the post-colonial policies adopted by India in disasters. A closer inspection of the current relief regimes during disasters in post-colonial India shows continuity and change. In the following sections I will follow the developments in post-colonial India vis a vis relief responses and the heterogeneous time⁴⁵ sequence in which they are played out.

This chapter will look at ways in which the statist notions of rights and entitlements to immediate relief and livelihood after disasters interact with the moral economy and its effect on the coping practices adopted in response to floods and erosion impacts. In brief, the argument goes as follows: disaster response work by the state involves immediate relief response (food relief, housing support) and other social protection entitlements to food and the reconstruction of livelihood security, currently done through the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), food security schemes, and various kinds of pensions: such as widow, disability and old-age pensions. However, the analysis shows that the moral economy, and the intersection of caste and gender, as well as governmentality in the planning and execution of these state run social protection programmes, significantly affect their outcomes and potentially create exclusionary impacts on the vulnerable social groups receiving these social protection benefits. The ways in which vulnerable groups respond to such situations constitute ‘subaltern’ political acts, since in order to access some of these benefits they are compelled to resort to ‘negotiating strategies’. Lastly, whilst social protection programmes and immediate disaster response – along with civil society social action and an active press – play a role in cushioning poor people by pulling them out of starvation deaths, the problems of malnutrition and hunger continue to be a pressing issue after floods (or potentially any disaster for that matter) and remain a major challenge for recovery. This brings the experience of power and powerlessness in disaster situations to the forefront and is the context within which subaltern groups carve out their politics of negotiating strategies for recovery from the disaster.

⁴⁵ I use the concept of heterogeneous time, borrowed from Chatterjee (2004) to denote the presence of past in the present.

5.2 Legal entitlements of affected people

5.2.1 Right to work, gender and caste

“Earlier there were test works. When there were drought conditions, the government use to allot money to meet the wages of the people, so that they can get work – earthworks. Before, we did not have NREGA [National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005] ... Whenever there was drought or famine, we used to run test works. The NREGA does the same now. It creates jobs people get wages and can buy goods and look after themselves. Further, assets are created. This is the basic concept. The same were called as test works at that time. At that time famine codes were used. Today too, we use the relief manual⁴⁶ whenever we have problems” (UP State Relief Commissioner, December 2008).

These words by the Relief Commissioner of UP, capture the presence of the past in the present responses for disaster relief as practiced in India today.

The NREGA became an act or a legal entitlement in 2005 guaranteeing 100 days of work for every household in rural areas of India. Whilst NREGA has been developed as a general development programme, whose twin objective is to provide livelihoods as well as create sustainable assets, and not only as a response to a disaster such as drought or floods, it nevertheless forms an important part of the overall relief measures adopted in the event of disasters. As one of the Pradhans⁴⁷ who had initiated NREGA after 2007 floods in the village observed:

“People had received some food in relief but were too meagre. It does not make much difference. What can we do? When 20 kg of rice [given in relief by the government] is over then they are left to themselves. They can either take *udhaar* [loan] from someone; it is all up to them -how they want to live, they have to survive somehow. What needs to be ensured is work for people, wages for people; as there will be nothing from the crops. What government should do is to give them work on a priority basis. Under this Government guaranteed scheme, all flood affected areas should be given work” (Focus Group Discussion with Pradhans, October 2008)

However, notwithstanding this statement, women are unable to gain employment under the NREGA: although the policy guidelines suggest 33 percent of the work force should be women. Sonadevi is a landless widow, from an intermediate caste group, about 55 years old, and is living on her own in the village of Ghagrapur. Her only daughter is married and stays in the same village, supporting her mother in whatever way she can. However, Sonadevi, although having to earn her own living and needing work, particularly after the

⁴⁶ The Famine Codes were replaced by a Relief Manual in UP after the independence of India.

⁴⁷ Pradhan refers to the elected village head.

floods when, due to the failure of the crops, there is not much farm wage labour to go round, is unable to be employed despite NREGA guidelines:

“Under *guarantee* [NREGA], they dig the soil. How can I do it? I can’t do it. But once the soil is dug, I can carry it ... but we are not called for work. If we are called, we will go to work with our *tokri* [carrying or head loading basket] ... but the Pradhan⁴⁸ says, how can you do this work? I asked Pradhan why does he not take out work which is suitable for me? But the Pradhan says you won’t be able to do it ... Here men get more government work. They can work on embankments, on guarantee work. Also men in this village go out to work to Lucknow, Delhi, and Punjab. I don’t go. I don’t want to work in somebody’s house. I don’t think it is right for me. My ancestors have never done such work. How can I do this work? How can I do *chauka-bartan* [cleaning and washing dishes/clothes]?” (Sonadevi, August 2008)

These words by Sonadevi show the male-stream gendered norms around labour in the researched villages which in spite of the NREGA guidelines, in practice, do not allow women to access this work. Further, whilst men are able to go out to cities, that is migrate and be employed in manual labour in the larger economy, women have even more limited choices in such participation and are often forced into low-paid jobs in these cities, such as menial domestic workers. Sonadevi is unwilling to do such work, mainly because members of her caste – kurmi – traditionally do agricultural work and have never engaged in domestic work as an occupation, and for her to do so would be to cause dishonour to her ancestors as well as people from her caste. Thus the social construction of gender and caste plays an important role in the ways in which people respond to situations and opportunities in relation to labour work in the village and elsewhere.

All castes have specific codes of ‘honour’ which play a role in constructing rules of appropriateness for the different kinds of works that women and men of different castes can do. Seema, aged 30 years who is from a former untouchable caste, also wanted to work under NREGA provisions, but could not: as she asserted, “women are not called for work.

⁴⁸ Two out of four researched villages had elected women Pradhans to seats reserved for women. However, in practice, the male persons (husbands or sons) in the household acted as Pradhans and participated in all the village meetings taking decisions as Pradhans. Thus although two women were de jure Pradhans it is the men from their household who were defacto Pradhans and took all decisions in relation to NREGA or other safety net programmes such as identifying and preparing the list of the beneficiaries of these programmes and implementing them. For the purpose of my analysis, given that the villagers (as well as the male relative of the elected female Pradhan who acted as Pradhans) considered these men as the Pradhans, I will treat these men as ‘Pradhans’ created as such through de-facto rather than de-jure means. I recognise that the standpoint of the elected women Pradhans in these cases is an important consideration; however it is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore them. At the minimum however, I do take these as indicators of female marginalisation in decision-making in public spaces in the researched villages.

Our Pradhan says “Taking women along with me for work, is a shame, it is like losing my honour ... How can I take women along with me for work?” (October 2008).

Women belonging to different castes in the researched villages practice semi-purdah to varying degrees, but common to all of them are codes of conduct that mediate modes of behaviour: that is, between women and men within the household as well as outside. The purdah is strongest among thakur women who cannot go for ordinary labour work in their or other people’s fields; the only work they can do is that which has a ‘white collar’ job element: such as teaching⁴⁹ in school or nursery. Doing physical labour in a public space for thakur women is considered a shame for the whole community. The practiced gender division of labour in the private and public realm are thus associated with notions of shame and honour for the thakur community. In the case of brahmans, whilst this is a general norm, women from some impoverished households amongst brahmans are now seeking farm labour. While women from the intermediate and scheduled castes do seek farm work, here too there are intricate and discrete ways of behaviour that women and male employer have to practice whilst at work. Shyam, a male aged 55 years from intermediate caste told me about how a male farm employer if approaching labouring women in the field, would loudly clear his throat so that working women would know about his coming and cover their face with their saris. In the case of Ghagrapur, the Pradhan (who belonged to the dominant thakur caste) had extended his notion of caste honour to the government work, effectively discriminating against women from other caste groups who otherwise worked as labourers on farms, and wanted NREGA work. Khera et al observe that while participation of women in NREGA has varied across states in India (from 15 to 82 percent), it is lowest in Uttar Pradesh (Khera & Nayak, 2009, October 24). In Sitapur, a neighbouring district of Bahraich, Khera et al report that only five percent of women participate in NREGA. They identify an active hostility by the men in the villages and gram panchayat members to the participation of women on account of women getting equal wages NREGA work (Khera and Nayak, 2009).

My field work suggests that, although the gram panchayat members and Pradhans (who came from dominant, intermediate and scheduled castes) in all the four researched villages – including Ghagrapur – had excluded women from NREGA, hostility to women’s work was not uniform across all the men of all the caste groups. Several men from non-upper

⁴⁹ In my field work villages, I did not come across any *thakur* woman, including those who belonged to very poor households who worked on farm fields as labourers.

caste groups were not averse to women from their social groups working on NREGA but were still sympathetic with the gram panchayat male person's viewpoint. Seema's husband, Raghu, aged 35 spoke in an understanding and empathizing tone as he explained to me, "You see he [Pradhan] feels *sharm* [shame] in taking women to work". Thus the play of notions of honour and shame concerning women's work and a "male bonding" on this issue between men in influential positions, such as Pradhans, gram-panchayat, and village men, played an important role in excluding women from accessing work. In other words, moral economy influenced the way, state entitlements worked in these villages.

Further, there were also other factors at work. Whilst Sonadevi in the instance given above felt that women could have been given work as carriers rather than diggers in the NREGA, a few other women who other-wise worked as agricultural labourers felt that they could not do any kind of soil work as diggers or carriers because they considered it to be different from farm work and required much more strength. Medha a poor landless woman, aged 60, and belonging to the former untouchable caste, and needing employment work states:

"We all go for mazdoori [daily labour work]. If we do not go for mazdoori, what will we eat? On the other side of embankment, where agricultural work is on, both men and women go for work ... But about carrying soil [in NREGA], how can women do this work? In our villages women do not do such work. In other places, I have seen women from Bihar doing this work. It is all about strength. They have the strength to do such work. We don't have it – we don't have enough nutrition in our diet to do so" (Medha, October 2008).

Another poor landless Muslim woman, Noorjahan, age 35 laughed at the idea of women doing carrier and digging work in NREGA and asked "How can women do men's work?" Further, one of the Pradhans when questioned on women's work participation in NREGA maintained "The work on our sites is very *tight* [very hard]. Women cannot do this work". In summary complex intertwining and intersecting of caste and gender ideologies and moralities around women's work, honour and shame can be seen to be the main obstacles to women asserting their right to work under NREGA, although many of them – and in particular women headed households or those whose husbands couldn't work due to various disabilities or had migrated to urban areas – desperately needed this work after floods due to the resulting local unemployment. According to the MICRODIS survey in the four flooded villages, 89 percent of male and 90 percent of female respondents have reported that their employment was adversely affected to a large or very large extent due to floods.

5.2.2 NREGA and test works: continuity and change

Notwithstanding the earlier assertion by the senior government officer about the similarity between NREGA and test works, the NREGA in its guidelines differs significantly from the test works taken in colonial times (discussed in the earlier chapter). The works are no more called as ‘test’ works and are now taken closer to home in their own gram panchayat, and in principle are to be planned and implemented by the elected gram panchayats⁵⁰. They are also non-discriminatory in principle, in terms of the wages to men and women. As a part of a social protection entitlement programme, they also have twin objectives: village development, including anti flood/erosion works; and the paying of wages to the people to act as safety net to cope with the livelihood loss arising from floods or any disaster. Further, while like the test works of colonial times, the only test applied now for obtaining work is the self acting test, there are important differences in what qualifies as the ‘self-acting test’. The colonial test works, operated on the active principle of deterrence by paying either wages lower than the local rates or penal wages with rigid and hard work; however, the self-acting principle in NREGA is governed by the universal principles of willingness to do manual labour on development work (which in principle would contribute to village development and sustainable livelihood in the long run), and of entitlement to a minimum wage in the area or more. In the researched villages of Bahraich, the wages payed in the NREGA – 2\$ (Rupees 100) per day has led to an upward revision of the farm wages locally. The farm wages for men have increased to 1 \$ (Rupees 40-50) while that for women 0.75 pence (Rupees 30-40) per day from the earlier 50 pence (Rupees 30 and 25) respectively. Similar upward wage revisions in ordinary farm wage labour were observed by Krishnaraj et al due to Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) in Maharashtra state, India, which has worked with similar principles such as NREGA (Krishnaraj, Pande & Kanchi, 2004a, April 17; 2004b, April 24)

The other differences between NREGA and the colonial test works as identified above, is that these works are ‘guaranteed’ by law unlike the colonial test works. The government is legally bound to give unemployment allowance to those people who are not given work after applying for the same. Nevertheless, in-spite of these important differences, the

⁵⁰ Gram panchayats in India are the lowest tier of elected body in India and have village level representatives. Gram sabha is the village assembly that is, every adult man and woman of the village are its members and vote for the elected representatives which act as gram panchayat for that village. A village Pradhan, also called a head, is elected by the gram sabha who acts as the leader of the panchayat and represents the village in all official meetings and development programmes.

NREGA, insofar as it uses waged manual labour work as a method of providing relief or a safety net for people plays conceptually the same role as colonial test works. In this sense, one can say that there is continuity and change in the ways in which disaster relief is being organised in the villages. Further, practices of governmentality continue although they have taken different forms from colonial days. In colonial days, the notion of normalising the racialised native was mobilised and played out through test relief works and famine discourses at a discursive level, as shown in earlier chapter. In the current scenario, although caste equality and gender equality are upheld in law and by the constitution – and – indeed furthered in principle through positive discrimination, as in government run programmes such as NREGA⁵¹ – caste and gender have discursive impacts on the actual workings of NREGA as well as on other developmental schemes. The self-acting manual labour tests in NREGA now take on a different meaning as gender and caste ideologies work to create ‘agency’ such that poor women and men are differently enabled or disabled from realizing their right to work by groups and officials in positions of power. Further, as I will show in the next subsection, in the light of their exclusion from government relief and developmental programmes, poor women and men feel disempowered from going to government officials to assert what are their rights by law: an outcome of the practices of governmentality as practiced today.

5.2.3 Right to work, empowerment and governmentality

Although 100 days of work is the legal entitlement of all households as per the NREGA act, in practice, the villagers (men) from the Ghagrapur said that they had got work for about 30 to 40 days under NREGA. Pradhans who have the mandate of implementing these programmes alleged that they “do not get money in that proportion to ensure 100 days of work for every person” (Focus Group Discussion with Pradhans, October 2008). People also alleged a misappropriation of funds, and felt that money for NREGA was siphoned off by the officials, and their elected representatives. Further the job-cards where entry for work, cash and wages were made were kept by the gram panchayat officials and

⁵¹ NREGA guidelines reserve thirty three percent of the labour generated for women’s participation and has a provision whereby soil and water conservation works can be undertaken on lands of Scheduled caste and tribes and below poverty line (BPL) families.

not given to the people: this non transparency creating further mistrust in the minds of the people.⁵²

While the NREGA programme was generally appreciated for its objectives and for its potential to give work to the unemployed, people did not believe that they will fully benefit from them due to the leakages in the funds through the '*bichuniya*' or middle men. The *bichuniya* were also generally considered to be the main problem for all other government food security or safety net programmes. In spite of the 'rights' based language of the NREGA, people who needed the work but did not get it, felt disempowered and did not really demand their right to employment or unemployment allowance, or had no say in the nature of the works undertaken under NREGA: although the guidelines clearly indicated that they possessed such rights. Decisions about the nature of the work to be available were not taken in the Gramsabha: although the act demands that be made. None of the respondents had applied formally in writing for work to their gram panchayat under NREGA or asked for an unemployment allowance for not providing the same: despite the fact that the village had women and men who needed such work.

In other words, the analysis shows that in the final instance, the NREGA programme does not fulfil its potential, discriminates against women, and disempowers poor people in its programming and its delivery. It is in this disempowering relationship that women and poor people find themselves at a disadvantage in relation to the influential classes and government officials that implement these programmes. Governmentality thus acts as a way of excluding the poor from the developmental programmes operating in the post-colonial India.

Interviews showed that, generally, people are very aware that benefits meant for them are often creamed off by others:

“There is some help but it is equal to nothing. The help from the Government is not used properly. Only 30 paise of one rupee [meaning 30% of total amount] reaches

⁵² Similar problems have been identified in the implementation of the NREGA nationally in an evaluation undertaken by the Institute of Applied Manpower Research (2008). This survey which was taken in 20 districts across various states records that on average the works was given for 35 days, had issues of financial leakages and non-transparency in the ways in which job-cards were kept and controlled by the gram panchayat and the government officials. Further, Bhatia and Dreze (2006) identify similar problems in the implementation of NREGA in Jharkhand District. Despite these problems, however, NREGA has been positively assessed by the rural poor by both these studies in the sense that it gives hope of employment to the rural poor who desperately need it. My own research points to similarly positive assessments made by the rural poor: despite problems being identified with the NREGA. See Bhatia, B. & Dreze, J. (2006) 'Employment Guarantee in Jharkhand: Ground Realities', *Economic and Political Weekly*, (July 22).

the people on ground⁵³ ... No *adhi kari* [Government officer] will directly take money or nominate agents. But this will happen for sure – only through them money will be made available. There are always intermediaries through whom money is taken – whether it is old age pension or any other scheme or money” (Focus Group Discussion with Men, October 2008)

Thus, it is not that impoverished people are unaware of their exclusion from relief and developmental benefits meant for them, it is more a case of them not wanting to get into a direct confrontation with the power of the dominant castes and the government officials or the entrenched gendered and caste hierarchies. The forthcoming sections will explore the reasons for poor people not wanting to engage in overt confrontations: for example loans or dependency, or out of fear of reprisal from powerful persons and social groups in the village. What is more commonly seen are the negotiation strategies that the poor employ with influential or powerful persons, or elected officials or government officials in order to get *some*, if not full, benefit from the state programmes meant for them. It is to these strategies that I will turn my attention in the forthcoming sections, as it is these actions that do not allow governmentality to be hegemonic or all pervasive. By this I mean that whilst governmentality as practices of controlling and excluding poor people are widespread, poor people have developed pro-active strategies within the confines of governmentality to obtain benefits by negotiation. However, before I go in to specific ways in which poor people practice such a negotiation in their daily lives, I unravel the subsequent revision of famine codes as well as other responses to disasters in India following independence and the wider civil society engagement with this form of governmentality. Indeed civil society critiques of the government constituting the politics *for* rights in the post independent era are the crucial wider context within which these negotiations by poor people are enabled.

5.3 State, civil society and governmentality

When India became free in 1947, the main institutional mechanism responding to any disaster was the colonial Famine Codes. These codes were further revised by different states in the 1950s and 1960s and were renamed as ‘scarcity manuals’ or ‘relief codes/manuals’. In Bombay, the famine codes were replaced by a “draft scarcity manual” in 1953 with revisions in its contents. Scarcity was defined as “marked deterioration of the agricultural season due to failure of rains, or floods or damage to crops from the insects

⁵³ This of-quoted remark by one of the former prime-ministers of India Rajiv Gandhi in parliament was also found to be quoted to me at different times by the people reflecting awareness about the percentage of money which actually trickles down to the people themselves.

resulting in severe unemployment and consequent distress among agricultural labour and small cultivators” (Subramanian, 1975 p. 31).

Subramanian, the revenue secretary of Government of Maharashtra had successfully coordinated the massive state relief response and averted famine deaths through the slogan of ‘*magel tyala kaam*’ (all those who want work will get it) during Maharashtra’s most horrific drought after independence which continued between 1970-73. Remarking on the change of emphasis – from famine to scarcity – he – says:

“It was no mere verbal heroics that induced the Government of the erstwhile Bombay State to replace the word ‘famine’ by the word ‘scarcity’ in all its rules, manuals, enactments etc. It was the expression of what Government considered an article of faith and a sincere and genuine attempt to instil confidence in the minds of the rural population with a long memory of hardship and suffering. It was also a reminder to the administration that it must move swiftly and effectively to relieve the situation at the very outset of the distress” (ibid, p. 31)

The change of emphasis from famine to scarcity or relief can be seen as aspirations or assertions by the post-colonial state which hoped to ensure that scarcity conditions would not be allowed to develop into famine by a swift intervention by the state.

Whilst test wage work as the main relief response during periods of scarcity continued through the revised scarcity manuals, there were revisions in the way in which they were to be taken up which varied from state to state: for example, the Bombay Scarcity Manual mandated that works are opened much closer to home; Bombay specified that this should be within 4 miles of a person’s residence and that work be undertaken on a priority basis in the order of irrigation works (tanks, bunds, drainage, channels), then soil conservation bunding and only lastly the road works (Government of Maharashtra, 1966). Further, relief work responses in the form of “self-acting” deterrence tests of labour – such as lower wages than those in the local areas as relief work responses – were discontinued after their widespread critique by civil society groups. For example, in Bombay, an Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) was launched in Maharashtra in 1975 after widespread wage work through ‘*magel tyala kaam*’ was used as a successful strategic programme to counter the 1971-73 famine in Maharashtra. The EGS guaranteed 100 days of employment to all who needed work in Maharashtra. Initially the scheme had kept the wages on a par with agricultural minimum wages and not on a par with the minimum wage applied to construction and maintenance work: the kind of work that was usually undertaken under EGS. Petitions were filed by the civil society groups in the high court which ruled that this

government action was unsustainable. This led to the enforcement of minimum wages in line with the work under-taken in all EGS works⁵⁴. Studies on EGS in Maharashtra show that areas which have an active presence of civil society groups have resulted in higher successes in ensuring properly remunerated employment. The political mobilisation also led to a higher participation of women in these programmes and the implementation of women-friendly provisions such as crèches, equal wages, drinking-water at the worksites (Chari Anurekha, 2005)⁵⁵. Similar observations are now being made in relation to the NREGA across the nation, building upon the success as well as the limitations of EGS in Maharashtra. Khera observes that the presence of people's organisations in the villages can be a major leverage to deliver under the NREGA not only full days of employment but also work which is valued by the people in terms of their development (Khera, 2008 August 30)

In Uttar Pradesh, where the researched villages are located, the "Floods and other Natural Calamities Manual" (Revenue (Scarcity) Department, Uttar Pradesh, 1970) replaced the famine codes and was the main guideline document for respond to any disaster, including floods. According to this manual, the main components of relief in cases of floods were gratuitous relief, to be given to those unable to maintain themselves; the evacuation of human beings and cattle; *takavi* (loans) for the building of houses; and the opening of works, particularly those considered productive: such as minor irrigation works, bunds, drainage works and embankments along rivers. Other activities included gauging the effect of erosion by flooded rivers. Further, the payment of wages was made equal for men and women doing similar work. Older respondents from my researched villages told of the relief given to them in earlier floods: for example, the massive floods that incurred in 1983 in the area.

Alongside opportunities for employment, as a part of relief response works, newer strategies too were introduced after independence: such as the institutionalization of the public distribution system (PDS) which maintained a buffer stock of food grains as a strategy to control food prices, as well as intervening in scarcity situations. The PDS which was started as a form of rationing during the Second World War in a few cities such as Bombay, was revolutionized in the 1960s into a universal programme to make inexpensive food available to everyone, and as a countermeasure to address the challenge of poverty

⁵⁴ Writ petition 2279 of 1983; Madan Wagare Vs state (Joshi 2009).

⁵⁵ Krishnaraj (2004a and 2004b) suggests that women's lack of awareness about their entitlements leads to them not being able to claim other mandated benefits under the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS): such as maternity benefits, equal wages and toilet facilities at worksites.

(Swaminathan Madhura, 2000). According to Dreze and Sen (1999), after disasters, food security would be one of the big casualties for any household. PDS thus played an important role in mitigating hunger during such times. They further note:

“[The] crucial changes have taken place in the domain of politics. The *existence* of the Famine Codes did not, after all, ensure their *application*, let alone their early and energetic application ... After independence, the political incentives to recognize emergencies, and to take action against the threat of famine, had to assume a new form. The vigour of political opposition has now made it impossible for the government to remain passive without major political risks, and the fear of losing elections reinforces the general sensitivity to political embarrassment in the state assembly and in the central parliament ... the press too plays a leading role. The affected populations themselves have a much greater ability than in the past to make their demands felt and to galvanize the authorities into action ... This is one of the positive aspects of Indian democracy”(Dreze & Sen, 1999 p. 126)

In other words, the new civil society spaces, a more responsive political society built through regular elections and a free press are some of the key elements which have ensured that there are no mass deaths due to acute food scarcities after massive floods and drought.

Further, the civil society groups have built upon the constitutional protections afforded through the fundamental rights and the directive principles of state policy as major foundations for the broadening of socio-economic rights in India for the poor. One of the most recent landmark movements has been the *right to food* and *right to information* campaigns, which include an informal network of mass organisations, social action groups and local NGOs. In 2001 a public interest litigation (PIL) by the PUCL (People’s Union for Civil Liberties) against the Government of India in 2001 led to several progressive orders by the Supreme Court making way for an entitlement which covered a wide food security basket for all vulnerable households and groups. The Petition was filed under article 21 of the Constitution which upholds the right to life (widened through earlier judgements by the Supreme Court⁵⁶) which made the state liable in the cases of its failure to protect its citizenry from starvation. This petition led to the mandatory institutionalisation and monitoring by the Supreme Court of the way that food security schemes are implemented and their reach to several states through Court appointed Commissioners and their advisors in each state. It ultimately led to progressive orders being issued by the Supreme Court such as, the universalisation of the midday meal in

⁵⁶ The relevant case laws have been noted in the chapter on theoretical framework.

every school; a more transparent transfer of PDS food under schemes such as Antodaya⁵⁷ meant for vulnerable groups; the universalisation of ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) through which nutrition and health services are given to children under the age of six. Other food security related schemes for vulnerable groups are: pension schemes for widows, old people and people with disabilities, which give them small allowances: these vary from state to state, but nevertheless are very important for the basic survival of these social groups. This sustained pressure from the Right to Food Campaign, also led to the enactment of the National Employment Guarantee Act, (NREGA) in 2005.⁵⁸

Apart from the manuals and schemes mentioned above, the post-colonial state has also evolved financial mechanisms for response to any disaster through specific relief in such times, governed under Calamity Relief Funds (CRF). Under article 280 of the Constitution of India, finance Commissions recommend assistance to the state governments by the Central Government of India for relief following natural calamities. The Ninth Commission introduced the idea of Calamity Relief Funds (CRF) wherein the ratio of state to Central government contribution was made 1:3 that is, a substantial contribution was to be met by the Centre. States can now draw upon this fund after they declare any event as a natural calamity. The CRF guidelines outline basic amounts to be given to the disaster-affected persons regarding house destruction, agricultural lands, loss of livelihoods, gratuitous reliefs, and other rehabilitation issues. Further, in 2001, a National Calamity Contingency Fund (NCCF) was constituted by the Eleventh Commission for calamities of severe scale which could not be met through the balances in CRF (Government of India, 2004). Finances from NCCF were augmented for relief and rehabilitation of affected persons during the Gujarat Earthquake of 2001 and the Tsunami of 2004. The flood relief responses studied in this Bahraich research context were based on CRF guidelines.

As stated in the chapter on theoretical framework, the Government of India has passed out the National Disaster Management Act (NDMA) in 2005, which expands mandatory state interventions in disaster preparedness and long-term disaster prevention planning by developing national, state and district level response and vulnerability reduction plans. However, in Uttar Pradesh and in Bahraich district, there were no real works done in this direction as mandated by the act up to December 2008, the end period of my fieldwork,

⁵⁷ Antodaya is one of the food security schemes, where highly subsidized paddy and other essentials are made available to the most vulnerable persons in a village.

⁵⁸ See the website at <http://www.righttofoodindia.org/> for more details about the Public Interest Litigation (PIL) and the campaign on “The Right to Food” in India

and therefore there was no empirical evidence that could be collected to evaluate their efficacy in the field. Hence any further discussion on the NDMA remains outside the scope of this chapter.

5.4 Negotiating with structures of power: strategies used and mobilised

5.4.1 Vulnerability and structures of power

“the river has eroded our lands, those who have money have purchased assets elsewhere, while those who don’t have anything do *time pass* ... if we don’t have money, then we have to somehow survive. For example, some day we will not have tea. We have to do *time pass*” (Savitri, a woman aged 45, luniya an intermediate caste, September 2008)

“My land has been eroded by the river. The *pataan* [deposition] on the land will be first followed by *reta* [sandy soil] on this land. We cannot sow anything on *reta*. During floods, we eat if we have and if not we somehow do *timepass*. What can we do? I told my children to not to go anywhere. There was so much of water around. What can we do? We somehow did *timepass*” (Sonpatta, a woman aged 40, chamar, scheduled caste, October 2008)

Several of the women and men I spoke to, talked about ‘*time pass*’: although an English phrase, it was commonly used by the people, to describe their situation during and after floods and erosion and what they did during those times. Now colloquially in India “*time pass*” means passing time in leisure. But for all the people who spoke to me about *time pass*, it was not about leisure; if anything it was a time passed in considerable distress, mainly dealing with the pangs of hunger. I realised that time-pass was another phrase used for ‘hunger’, a coded language which represented and needed to be understood in terms not of what it conveyed in its verbal meaning, but rather in what it did not say or communicate. If time is understood as the “indefinite continued progress of existence” where events are measured in terms of the “past, present and future”⁵⁹, *time-pass* was its opposite: a time, when time comes to a standstill, when the individual deals with the primordial question of hunger and existence. Several people found themselves in an impoverished condition particularly after the floods and erosion. Table 3 gives the food and economic position of the households after the 2007 floods based on the analysis of the MICRODIS survey data in the four flooded villages.

⁵⁹ Oxford dictionary online; see http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/time?view=uk

Table 3: Food and economic position of the household after floods of 2007

	Food and economic position	General castes	Other backward castes (OBC)	Scheduled castes (SC)
1	Economic position has worsened after floods	97	96	98
2	They had enough food to eat before the floods	84.3	76.6	79.3
3	They did not have enough food to eat after the floods	83.3	80.3	79
4	Eating less as a strategy used to cope with the food scarcity after floods	93.1	90.1	93.1

Table 3 shows that 97 percent of people belonging to general castes, 98.percent belonging to Scheduled castes (SC), and 96percent belonging to ‘other backward classes’ (OBC) had stated that their economic position had worsened. Further, while 84.3percent of general castes, 79.3 percent of Scheduled castes, and 76.6 percent of OBC reported that they had enough food to eat before the floods, 83.3 percent of general castes, 79 percent of scheduled castes and 80.3 percent of OBCs reported that they did not have enough food to eat after the floods. Eating less (93.1 percent general castes, 93.1 percent SCs, and 90.1 percent OBCs) was the common strategy used to deal with this situation of food scarcity after floods. Other strategies reported were: going without certain kinds of nutritious food such as *dals* (lentils) or *sabji* (vegetables); and converting rice into larger amounts of watery gruel, so that larger amounts could be consumed as a way of dealing with the pangs of hunger.

This issue of hunger faced by people impoverished after floods and erosion forms the main backdrop against which the ability of people to challenge governmentality needs to be understood. The vulnerability arising from hunger informs the choices made by people in terms of strategies or tactics used to access resources for survival from the state or from dominant/influential persons who may control the resources in question. While James Scott in his ‘weapons of the weak’ (Scott, 1985) outlines the everyday forms of protests used by poorer people to question their exploiter, I use the concept of strategies or tactics used by poor people, more to communicate with the structures of power by ‘negotiation’ rather than by covert or overt protest. In this respect they are closer to the strategies used by women as suggested by Kandiyoti in ‘Bargaining with Patriarchy’ (Kandiyoti, 1988).

Consider what Laxman, from a scheduled caste, aged 36 years and Sonadevi a widow, aged 55 years and from kurmi, an intermediate caste had to say when asked as to why they

did not go to seek justice with higher officials in the government as they felt that relief and development benefits for them were creamed off by the middlemen or *bichuniya*:

“Sonadevi: Nobody hears poor people’s voice. Poor do not get a *sunvaiyi* (hearing for justice)

Laxman: Yes, rich people go ahead, while the poor people are pushed out.

SA: on the basis of caste?

Laxman: Yes, caste is also considered. For example, thakurs have a name, but the voice of a poorer thakur is not heard as much as rich thakurs.

SA: what is *sunvaiyi*?

Laxman: *Sunvaiyi* means I have told you my problem, and you have looked into it. But instead what happens is that you just yell at me as in English and say ‘*get out*’.

Me: Have you gone for a *sunvaiyi*?

Laxman: No, I have not gone to anyone with my problem. How can a poor person like me seek *sunvaiyi*. You need money for this.

Sonadevi: if you have four *paise*, what would you do? Seek *sunvaiyi* or buy food for your family and children?

Laxman: you need money for travel.

Sonadevi: We don’t have enough food, so how can we think about going around seeking *sunvaiyi*?

Laxman: Anyway, what is the point of it all? We will only come back with a fallen face. (Laxman and Sonadevi September 2008)

This popular perception of the government-people relation is best captured by the local proverb told to me “*hakim ke aghadi aur ghode ke pichadi na jaiyyo*” (do not walk in front of an officer or behind a horse), meaning in both the cases you will be kicked or some adversity will befall you! It also suggests the lack of trust that poor people have in government officials.

Further, hunger or poverty creates vulnerabilities as well as dependencies on the dominant or richer classes in the villages, as loans, or *karja* are taken from these groups to overcome the situations of need: such as food consumption, or social occasions such as marriages, or health problems and illnesses. In the MICRODIS survey, a large number of people (56.9 percent of general castes, 65.5 percent of SCs, and 63.8 percent of OBCs) were found to be in debt, and had used loans as a coping strategy to deal with the impacts of floods. Sections of people from the scheduled or intermediate caste groups also feared reprisals, should they openly resist or question the influential upper-caste persons, who they believed to be in league with the government officials, and to have cornered the benefits from the schemes meant for them. It was alleged that there were three fires in the last 20 years which were deliberately set by persons from sections of influential upper-caste groups,

which led to the destruction of the thatched huts of the intermediate or scheduled caste groups as a reprisal for some action in a dispute.

5.4.2 Power, powerlessness and strategies for negotiation

Kamaladevi is a poor elderly widow of about 70 years, from a scheduled caste. Her household has now lost to river erosion most of the land it had acquired under land reforms. She gave half of her first monthly widow's pension to an influential person from an upper-caste community in her village, once she was made a beneficiary under the widow pension scheme. She had made a pact with this person who claimed he needed to give that money to the petty government officials in order to enter her name on the beneficiary list. After this first deduction from her widow's pension, she is now getting her pension in full.

This is an example of a very common strategy, used by poor women and men, of giving small amounts of money to influential persons in the village in order to receive payments to which they were already genuinely entitled according to the government norms. Whilst in official terms her action may be called colluding in corruption, for Kamaladevi, it is a pragmatic compromise, a negotiation, which would give her some long term security even though the pension amounts are very meagre (6-7 dollars per month). With this money she will still be able to buy her monthly ration of rice under other subsidized food schemes such as PDS, as well as buy some clothes for herself during festival times. In this way, she will have some autonomy, whilst living with her adult working sons who themselves eke out a living through manual labour. Narayan, aged 38, too had to give a part of his first instalment of the monthly pension to get a disability pension (6-7 dollars per month) which although meagre, he feels acts as an important "*sahara*" (support) and used his pension for buying seeds for sowing the family land following the 2007 floods.

Although the amounts are meagre, the importance to the poor of accessing these safety net schemes cannot be underestimated in the sense that they are what sometimes, keep poor people from being pushed into starvation deaths, or what enable old people to retain a measure of dignity whilst living with their children: as in the case of Kamaladevi.

Following the September 2008 floods, the Government of Uttar Pradesh, according to the established norm, distributed to each household amongst the flood-affected people a food bundle consisting of 20 kg of rice - and other food items. The criterion used to distribute

this food bundle was one food bundle per household irrespective of number of people residing in it, and was given to the head of the household. This in itself caused the current official government policy followed by the UP government in food relief distribution, to be discriminatory towards widowed women, as food bundle was given to one identified by adult male as its head. Thus, a widowed woman staying with her adult sons, but cooking separately was not given a separate food relief bundle but was considered to get her share from the food relief bundle, that her son got as the head of the household. This puts widowed women at a disadvantage. Thus, a poor widow Janaki, belonging to a scheduled caste, and aged 65, felt discriminated against by this practice and had raised the issue in her village without much success: “I have four sons, who have received separate food bundles, but they have their own families. Will they look after them or after me?” Recognising the vulnerability of widows, a report by NC Saxena (2008) the Food Rights Commissioner appointed by the Supreme Court, has recommended that all single women regardless of whether they live with their dependents, or alone, in their natal family or their husband’s, should be given a separate ration card (Saxena, 2008). My analysis supports this recommendation which needs to be implemented through all food relief schemes as a matter of right, as it would enable them to live with dignity with their own families, a need articulated by Janaki and other widows in the villages who were denied a separate food bundle. Similar norms are applied to house assistance benefits following their destruction in floods. Here too, although Janaki, was living in a small family shed/hut where she cooked separately, different from her four sons, she was considered to be living with one of her sons and denied a separate housing assistance following the 2007 floods.

Yet, in the same village, two other poor widows, although living with their adult sons and belonging to the schedule castes, were able to access a separate housing assistance and food relief bundle from the distributing authorities as the Pradhan of the village treated them as living in separate households. Now, why did the Pradhan extend this benefit to these two poor widows and not to Janaki? The answer lies in the social connection that the families of these two poor widows have with the Pradhan’s household as compared to that of Janaki. A large amount of time is spent by many poor families in establishing a social relationship with influential persons in their village. This social relationship is established by poorer women who spend social time with women from better off households by helping them sometimes in their housework, or simply visiting them and exchanging courtesies, so that this social relationship could help them in times of distress or want.

Similarly men from poorer households would do some occasional ‘free’ work for influential families or invite the influential person for social ceremonies in their houses, a way of showing respect to them. This emotional work invested in building social networks and relationships with influential persons, then gives them access to government programme benefits, to which they are anyway entitled, but for which, because they have no access to its gate-keepers, they are powerless to bargain. Similarly, it is this emotional work with influential or richer groups that enable them to negotiate for a timely loan on a concessional basis in case of emergency or dire need. For example, the analysis of the MICRODIS survey data shows that, whilst 23.5 percent of general castes, 35.1 percent of SCs and 42.4 percent of OBCs had taken out loans at the standard local interest rate of 10 percent, 14.9 percent of general castes, 19.4 percent of SCs and 14.5 percent of OBCs were able to take out loans on concessional interest rates below the standard 10 percent.⁶⁰ In such a relation, the person from the influential group often acts as an advocate with other persons in power or are themselves the main gatekeepers, so that they can get the appropriate relief support which, in any case, the poor are entitled according to government norms.

This complex relation-building behaviour is called *bhav-vyavhar* as it comprises both a behavioural (*vyavhar*) and an emotional (*bhav*) relationship with the influential groups⁶¹, Hari, a male aged 50 and from a chamar caste, a scheduled caste explained how this relationship works:

Hari: “Village X has a moneylender. I will go to him, do a one day’s free labour such as doing repair of fencing, or roofs, or any other work that may be needed. I will not take money for this work. Then when I have a need, he will lend me some money ... *bhav-vyavhar* is like this. When you have a need, I come to your rescue, and when I have a need, you help me out. This is what happens in our rural areas ...

SA: So do you work for this person till you have paid off the loan?

Hari: No no ... it does not work in that way. I would go and help him in his work, even when the loan is paid off. I go since we have a *bhav-vyavhar*. Again I may have a need of Rs 10-20/- on some other day and I may have to ask him for help. For example, you have come, and now that I have a need, I give you a long welcome, but when my need is over, that is, after you have done my work, I don’t

⁶⁰ I do not include in this those who had received loans without any or nil interest rate – as this implies another form of relation between the persons concerned rather than between those who have taken out loans on an interest basis, albeit concessional.

⁶¹ There were another kind of *bhav-vyavhar* in the villages that I studied. In this chapter I refer to only one kind of behaviour – the emotional work between influential and marginalised groups. This concept is discussed further in the last empirical chapter “Disasters, Social Change and the Politics for Rights”.

do *Namaste* [welcome] to you, then it is not right. That *Namaste* which continues all through the life is good ... this is *bhav-vyavhar* in our village. It is not based on force or fight”.

(Hari, October 2008)

Another person, Laxman, a male aged 36 and from a scheduled caste, recounted how he had received a loan from a person belonging to an upper-caste group in his village at a concessional rate of interest, namely four percent while the general rate of interest in the village was ten percent as he had a “*bhav vyavhar*” relation with him. Several other persons from schedule caste and intermediate caste groups also reported a special relationship of *bhav-vyavhar* with an influential person who in turn helped them out in ‘extra-special’ ways.

Mala, a woman aged 35 from luniya, an intermediate caste, explained how the *vyavhar* she had built over the last 4-5 years, with one family from an upper-caste group in her village had in turn helped her get food for her family during the floods. The *vyavhar* was built through doing work for this family in return for wages. Mala recounted:

“they had come once to my part of the village asking whether anybody would do labour work for them. I told them, that I would do the work. Since then, we have *vyavhar* between us. That’s all ... it works in this way. When there is any work, they call me, such as cutting or threshing of paddy, or wheat. I do their work, they give me wages. I don’t have *vyavhar* with any other family ... I went to ask for food to them during the floods. I don’t go to others as I don’t feel they will help me...I only went to this family” (Mala, September 2008)

In other words, a lot of emotional and physical work was invested by poorer women and men in the maintaining and sustaining of social relationships with richer or influential persons in the village. These emotional investments in turn helped them in securing such fringe benefits as are recounted above: an added separate food relief bundle, or housing assistance for the widow in a household; or a loan at a concessional rate; or some food in times of need. The emotional work done by the poorer groups in order to develop emotional social ties with persons from richer or influential groups in the village are an important strategy through which poor and otherwise excluded families negotiate their way: in order to survive or receive government benefits, which they in any case should get as a matter of right. Similar observations were made by informants where *bhav-vyavhar* was instrumental in enabling access to other government schemes such as widows, old age or disability pensions or to an Antodaya card: a card meant for most vulnerable persons which enables them to get paddy or wheat at a highly subsidized rate from the ration shop.

These negotiating strategies by the poorer and marginalised groups can be better understood if one locates them further within the local context of power and powerlessness. To understand the power dynamics further, I give the analysis of the MICRODIS survey data in Table 4 on the government support accessed by different caste groups following 2007 floods.

Table 4: Support accessed from the government following 2007 floods:

	Support from the government following floods	General castes	Other backward castes (OBC)	Scheduled castes (SC)
1	Cash support received from the government	52.2 %	32.7%	36.4%
2	Service support (e.g health care) received from the government	45.1%	34.9%	32.8%
3	Material support such as food relief received from the government	66.7%	68%	62.5%

Table 4 shows that a majority (that is 52.2 percent) of persons belonging to the general caste groups were able to obtain cash relief support from the government as compared to 36.4 percent of SCs and 32.7 percent of OBCs. Similarly about 45.1 percent of persons from general castes, 32.8 percent from SCs, and 34.9 percent of OBCs were able to receive support from services such as health care after the floods. Not much difference was observed in relation to receiving material support mainly in the form of food items between general castes and other back ward castes, although the scheduled castes received lower food support (66.7 percent general castes, 62.5 percent SCs, and 68 percent OBCs).

Generally speaking, this suggests that persons from the general castes had better access to government benefit provision than those from the scheduled or intermediate castes. Further, connections with influential and powerful persons were considered universally important by all caste groups for the purpose of obtaining government relief support. 86.2 percent of general castes, 82.8 percent of SCs and 88.7 percent of OBCs felt that people who had better connections with powerful groups got more relief and rehabilitation benefits than others. This explains further, why investment of emotional work in developing and maintaining relationships with influential persons through *bhav-vyavhar* is considered an important negotiating strategy by the otherwise excluded and impoverished persons in the villages.

The most important aspect of the *bhav-vyavhar* relation is that by its very nature, the relationship demands a reciprocal action from each person – albeit of different kinds. Both,

in this case recognise the unequal relationship between the two in terms of resources and power. It is understood that the person in an influential position will reciprocate the emotional sentiment shown by poor persons by showing extra care towards for them as compared to others. As reciprocity of actions is the core sentiment behind *bhav-vyavhar* of this kind, I call it a “localised notion of entitlement” in the sense that both the parties considered themselves ‘entitled’ to give to each-other according to requirements of their respective needs.

Sahlins has classified three different reciprocal exchanges between people; namely ‘generalised’ exchange, ‘balanced’ exchange and ‘negative’ exchange (Sahlins, 1965a; 1965b). The generalised exchange stands for giving good without immediate return, balanced for giving and receiving an equivalent return, and negative for giving in return for a profit. Sahlins suggests that the nature of these reciprocities depends on the social distance between the individuals concerned. In the researched villages, two principled forms of *bhav-vyavhar* were observed: one where reciprocal exchange was of equivalent goods and is amongst equals (discussed in last empirical chapter “Disasters, social change and the politics for rights”), and the other where the reciprocal exchange was based on non-equivalent goods as discussed above in this section. The reciprocity of non-equivalent goods is found typically amongst patron-client relationships. In these relations, while the patron gave food items or petty cash, the reciprocal action was often seen in terms of labour, and symbolic behaviour of care and friendship towards each-other. It was also observed that the poorer classes are mobilised by the richer patron not only for work, during times of labour scarcity, but also during a local feud to maintain their sphere of dominance or influence over wider networks. For example, one of the patrons mobilised people who had a relation of *bhav-vyavhar* with him, to complain to the local government officer against a holder of a ration-shop (fair-price shop for subsidized food). Influence within the wider social networks involving government officers, is thus maintained by invoking sentiments of *bhav-vyavhar* by the richer patrons.

I will return to these issues in the last empirical chapter where I will deal with another dimension of *bhav-vyavhar*: that is a relationship between equals as opposed to here where the parties are unequal in terms of resources and access to institutional structures of power or gatekeepers such as government officials. The *notion of bhav-vyavhar* as localised notions of entitlements, is thus different from statist notions of entitlements but has important consequences for the way in which state entitlements are produced. The outcome

in terms of who gets what is thus dependent upon how the statist notion of entitlement is mobilised through localised notions of entitlement: in this case, through a relation of *bhav-vyavhar* between persons in unequal socio-economic positions.

To the extent that these negotiations are based on certain localised notions of entitlements, they can be said to be a part of what James Scott (1976) calls the ‘moral economy’ which comes into play in a patron-client relationship. Scott (1976, p. 184) suggests that in a pre-capitalist normative order a “guarantee of *minimal social rights* in the absence of political or civil rights” is expected from elites or well-off neighbours by the peasantry. However, in the above cases, the moral economy of the researched villages is guided more by normative concerns which arise not from a generalised notion of care for poorer neighbours by village elites or better off persons, as described by Scott, but from individualised special relationships of *reciprocity* built with meticulous care by the poor in order to mobilize or negotiate a better deal from the better off or influential persons or patrons in their village. In that sense, the relationship can be described more as a ‘negotiating strategy’ than what according to Scott’s research is a generalised social right enjoyed by the poor.

Further, these relations of unequal exchange although similar to a patron-client relation, are different from traditional forms of it in India: as exhibited through either *Jajmani* relations (Gould, 1981) or relations of bonded, unfree or semi-attached labour-landlord relation (Breman, 1974; 2007). A *Jajmani* system refers to the “landowning castes of families called *Jajmans* [who] exchange shares of crops grown on their land in return for ritual and economic services from landed castes of families”(Rudner, 2003 p. 303). Dumont calls *Jajmani* a division of labour in traditional India in which landless castes access their means of subsistence from the landed by performing a ritual or a function that the landed caste requires (Dumont, 1998). In the researched area, such *Jajmani* relations had a weak presence. For example, while the village barber collected a share of the produce from certain families across all castes for the whole year of services, he also visited local towns to earn cash money by cutting hair in a local salon. The other castes, such as *dhobis* or washer-people, and *chamars* (carriers of dead animals) had long given up these occupations in the villages and were now working as either landless labourers or marginal farmers in the villages or were found to be migrating for work. The other patron-client system noted by scholars in India is, that between a bonded or un-free labour-landlord, such as *halipratha* in South Gujarat (Breman, 1974; 2007). In the researched villages, no

such organised system of bonded labour-landlord was found, yet it was here observed that “*Karja*”, or the debt from a landowner by the landless labourers, did lead to landless labourers doing certain free labour or work at lowered wages for the landowner till the *Karja* was paid back. However, these relations were *not* recognised as *bhav-vyavhar* either by the landowner or by the labourer, as they did not have the symbolic elements of affection and care that was attached to the *bhav-vyavhar*, nor did they have an element of obligation or reciprocity towards each-other. Many such relations were more in line with the “casualisation” of labour (Platteau, 1995) where debts were taken at a market interest rate and paid back through labour or in cash. The non-equivalent transactions of *bhav-vyavhar* are thus different from both the traditional *Jajmani* or the bonded-or unfree labour relations found elsewhere in India or the general relations between money lenders and debtors in the researched villages.

To sum up, the relations of *bhav-vyavhar* observed through the patron-client relation in this section enable both parties to cope with their respective risks and also to extend their spheres of influence in social and political life after the event of a disasters. In that sense, as a local notion of entitlement, *bhav-vyavhar* needs to be judged through its potential for coping with risk and as a negotiating strategy rather than, as suggested by Sahlins, a sign of social distance or negative reciprocity.

5.5 Disaster response, challenge of root causes and governmentality

As stated by Dreze and Sen (1999), it is true that famines or large scale starvation deaths in post-independent India have been averted; however, a major problem of malnutrition amongst a large section of population persists to date.

In fact, the concept of ‘starvation deaths’ became a contested term in post-colonial India, with some arguing that starvation should be seen as the end point of a larger process of political, social and economic marginalisation and that it would be incorrect to call labour-intensive employment, which provided exchange entitlements, adequate responses to starvation or any post-disaster situations (Rangaswami, 1985). Thus, in this analysis, the impacts of famine and other disasters which lead to food scarcities in households are considered a result of broader socio-economic-political processes which create conditions of impoverishment and make such impoverished people vulnerable to the effects of these disasters. It is these root causes of marginalisation from more development that need to be tackled. One can see that although the current context differs hugely from colonial days,

such an analysis has overt similarities with the political economy critique of famines in British India made by Naoroji and later by Gandhi, and as indicated in the debates within the British Parliament. (See the chapter Rights and governmentality: famine response in colonial India): these also raised questions about the root causes of poverty, famines and disasters.

The analysis as advocated by Rangaswami (1985), and more recently by Sen (2004) requires that the disaster response needs to go beyond the prevention of starvation deaths during or after famine or any disasters (Sen, 2004). A much deeper developmental agenda is needed to be put in place as a wider strategy to deal with poverty, impoverishment and the resulting food scarcities after disasters: as also noted in the researched villages. Civil society groups in India have attempted to broaden and deepen this developmental agenda by pressurising the state to bring a right to education, a right to livelihood, a right to health, and a right to food within the ambit of state response. They also attempted to make the state itself more transparent and accountable, through campaigns such as the right to information and the social audit; and achieved a measure of success⁶². Further issues such as land reform and an equitable distribution of lands are also raised for the purpose of creating a wider socio-economic condition of relative equality for all sections of the population. In the following subsection, I analyse the local socio-economic-political processes of marginalisation and recovery through the lens of access to eroded and deposited lands by the River Ghagra, land being a major resource in rural areas.

5.5.1 *Jike lathi kuhra tike chari kuvra* (the one whose stick is stronger will get the land)

This rural proverb was recited to me a number of times by people across all social groups, when I asked about how and when they might regain their lands, when they have been eroded and later deposited by the river. In the field area, the deposition by the river is called “*pataan*” while the erosion by the river is called “*kataan*”. The proverb sums up eloquently the land dynamics in the area.

Chand, aged 35, is a carpenter belonging to an intermediate gudiya caste group and now living on the embankment after the erosion of his house and lands in his native village. It

⁶² The civil society action has led to government enacting progressive acts for universalisation of education, Right to work, and Right to information.

has been almost eight years since he lost his land through erosion by the Ghagra. Chand: states

“my land is under *pataan* but is far away from here. But *jabar* [powerful] people have sown on those deposited lands. I will not get this land till it is measured by the government. Till the tehsildar, patwari, lekhpaa [all local government officials with the revenue department] do not measure the deposited land and tell me that this is your field, I won’t get my land back. If I go on my own, I am threatened and told “your land is not here”. It is the *jabar* people who are sowing and ploughing the deposited lands”. (Chand, September 2008)

This was a common narrative of persons who had lost their lands through the erosion by the River Ghagra and had neither regained it nor really hoped to regain it when it did get deposited in the near future. Thus land conflict was an important outcome of erosion and deposition by the river.

The “*Jabar*” people in this case, were considered those who were rich and also those who had the muscle power to stay in the area termed as ‘*reta*’ or ‘*kondhri*’, where constant erosion and deposition or *kataan* and *pataan* of the river take place. The *reta* is often described as a dangerous area to live, as it is constantly under the threat of being washed away in floods and erosion. Much of the eroded lands belonging to the scheduled and intermediate caste groups in the researched villages were gained by them in the first place about 40-50 years ago under the land reform acts carried out in Uttar Pradesh. My own field discussions suggest that land reforms were a mixed success in the field area, as many of the households belonging to the scheduled caste and intermediate groups reported receiving land titles through land reforms and becoming marginal⁶³ farmers in the process. On the other hand, narratives from the field also suggest that not all surplus land or tenancy land was distributed amongst the poor through land reforms. The limited gains from the land reforms, are now being reversed as those who had gained lands are now becoming landless. Further, in many cases, even those belonging to the landed upper-caste groups have become landless or marginal farmers due to river erosion, with their lands not yet deposited. Thus those belonging to the scheduled and intermediate caste groups and some also to the earlier landed upper-caste groups are now impoverished due to *kataan*. Many

⁶³ The NABARD (National Agricultural Bank and Rural Development) of India uses following classifications for landless, marginal, middle and large land holders: less than one hectare (marginal); one to two hectares (small) and more than two hectares as (large) farmers. I will follow this classification in my use of the terminology through this thesis (See Shenoi, P. V. (2005) *Managerial Strategy for Agricultural Development in the early 21st century*. Mumbai: National Agricultural Banking And Rural Development [Online]. Available at: <http://nabard.org/fileupload/DataBank/OccasionalPapers/OC%2035.pdf> (Accessed: 7th june 2010).

such households had to come and live on the Belha- Behroli embankment built by the government as they had no other place to stay and to conduct their livelihoods.

A transect walk through the *reta* and discussions with groups of people staying in the *reta* showed an intricate pattern of negotiations that influential persons from the mainland villages entered into with those staying in the *reta*. The people living on the *reta* were identified mainly as *purvijas*, (designating people from other parts of Uttar Pradesh who had come to stay in the *reta* some generations ago) and occupied vacant lands under constant *kataan* and *pataan* of the river in these areas. Also, such lands were available at a much low price than other lands in the markets. Others who lived on *reta* areas were mainly ahirs⁶⁴. One of the strategies followed by influential households, who lived on the mainland but controlled lands in *reta*, was by capturing these deposited lands by measuring and drawing boundaries of their own on deposited lands. Many developed an understanding with the settled *purvijas* in *reta* by giving them this self-measured land on a share-cropping basis. In this way, some influential households were able to negotiate control over deposited lands through *purvijas*. A few households which belonged to the scheduled caste or intermediate caste groups which cultivated in *reta* used the backing of powerful patrons, as their main negotiating strategy. Ramesh, aged 30 and belonging to an intermediate gudiya caste, is living in *reta* and cultivating deposited lands, while the rest of his family is living on the embankment. He has the backing of an influential patron from the neighbouring village who was summoned to do measurements of the deposited lands. Ramesh remarks:

“Patwari hardly comes in to do measurements here. What happens is that some village leader will be summoned and told, “brother, you know the area”. Then he will delineate these lands by measuring them and instructing us – go this way, go that way. Somebody who is a thakur or a brahman may be given more lands than they had earlier. What can you do? If you say anything, you will be beaten up”. (Ramesh, November 2008)

Nevertheless, this strategy of summoning a powerful person as an arbitrator is a means of accessing deposited land for persons like Ramesh, who now can cultivate it as his own without interference from other people.

Senior officials within the revenue department are aware of land conflicts, but said that they intervene and do measurements “when they receive a complaint from those whose

⁶⁴ Ahirs traditionally keep cattle as their main livelihood resource and the parts of *reta* which are covered with grass are considered suitable for keeping cattle.

lands are taken away wrongly by the powerful people” (Senior Official, Tehsil Mehsi, November 2008). All this generally means that poor people who may not have the power or resources to complain and have lost their lands in *kataan* may never get their lands back, unless they are able to mobilise the backing of a powerful patron. This explains why Chand and many others are sceptical about ever again getting back their lost land in *kataan*.

To sum up, in *reta* or villages affected by floods and *kataan*, the state apparatus has not yet penetrated enough to secure justice for the poor and those generally excluded from development processes in particular.⁶⁵

5.6 Summing up

Constitutional measures to further gender and caste equalities, disaster relief responses, and safety net safeguards and, in addition civil society actions and campaigns, such as the right to food and work, have made significant interventions at the macro-level in furthering equity, and at the micro level in cushioning the impacts of floods. Although minimal, the government-supported social protection and safety net programmes are considered to be important by the poor and by those excluded from general development processes. They also stave off starvation deaths and in that sense are geared towards maintaining *bare life* only. Thus the *homo sacer* is reproduced through the minimalist entitlements by the Indian Government, which keeps sections of populations between a state of well being and bare living after disasters. Collins argues that a “progress in disaster reduction” needs to be gauged “in terms of people’s transition from vulnerability to wellbeing” (Collins, 2009, p. 250). To the extent that well being eludes a large sections of population after disaster suggests that the right to development and the right to transparent governance, are important issues which continue to affect flood recovery and risk reduction processes.

Further, poorer and excluded groups are not fully able to gain access to the basic state entitlements – namely the social protection and safety programmes – due to reasons such as the entrenched gender, class and caste structures of the moral economy which influence the way in which state entitlements and rights are produced and played out. Notions of honour and shame play an important role. Local notions of entitlement and rights such as *bhav-vyavhar*, which rely on a reciprocal obligation between persons who are otherwise

⁶⁵ The fourth Citizens report, by Centre for Science (1990), New Delhi titled “Living with floods” too reports land grabbing by dominant or landed classes resulting in land conflicts in Bihar in *diara* lands which are eroded and deposited by Kosi River.

placed at socio-economically unequal levels, and operate through a patron-client relation, are mobilised to cope with flood and erosion effects. In this way *bhav-vyavhar* is used as a negotiating strategy by the poorer and otherwise excluded persons to access government entitlements, and act as a subaltern political strategy to deal with the effects of local political economy and thus to gain access to the benefits system. Similarly, the example of land conflict in *reta* areas also shows the operation of local political economy processes and the way power and powerlessness is mediated and managed by the poorer and excluded groups after floods and erosion, given that the state administration is not able to deliver justice in *reta* areas. Here too, these subaltern groups use negotiating strategies with the influential persons to gain access to lands in *reta* areas.

In sum, the chapter has analysed how statist notions of rights, moral economy, subaltern politics and their intersection with each-other affects the production of rights. From the perspective of rights, the chapter further shows how a *homo sacer*, as a person living between a condition of well-being and bare-living, is produced by minimalist state interventions following disasters. It also shows how the politics *for* rights by civil society groups has questioned the production of this *homo sacer* by seeking to expand the purview of the social protection and safety programmes by the Indian Government. Lastly, the chapter also shows how the local subaltern politics *for* rights interact with the effects of the local political economy, and with moral economy structures, to contribute to a production of rights that affect coping. In other words, the social vulnerability approach with its emphasis on a political economy and gender analysis needs to be complemented with another set of analyses that bring in a perspective on how rights are produced in coping with disasters. Together they potentially offer a better analytical grid for understanding the effects of disasters and for the alignment of strategies that will further the disaster risk reduction processes in disasters.

Chapter 6

Disasters, Social Nature and the Subaltern

6.1 Introduction

One of the issues discussed by the last chapter was the way the local political economy processes in the researched villages and *reta* areas influenced disaster outcomes, in terms of differential impacts and coping strategies mediated due to differential experiences of power and powerlessness. This chapter engages with these local political economy processes and experiences from the perspective of political ecology, given that flooding and meandering of the River Ghagra and the government's technical response to floods and erosion in the researched villages and *reta* areas also create their own politics of nature.

This chapter further shows that a political ecology approach (a variant of the social vulnerability approach as discussed in the theoretical framework) to disaster that looks at the way in which social ecologies are formed and distributed through geographies of power is *not* enough to fully understand the impacts of disaster. The chapter shows how the socio-political constructions of nature and disasters which ascribe notions of rights and responsibilities to society and nature shape people's approaches to disasters and also have implications for disaster risk reduction strategies. It also evaluates people's choices or critiques of the technocratic approaches to disaster risk reduction by the government in relation to, and the extent to which they resonate with, the ethics proposed by the eco-centric approaches (Leopold, 1970; Naess, 1989; Merchant, 1992; Pepper, 1996).

To do this I start by discussing the concept of "social nature" and use it to analyse the socio-political representations of floods and erosion and ask what sort of a nature- people relation is constructed through them. I further analyse the ethical/normative underpinnings posed by the local and subaltern representations of disasters, and society-nature relationship and suggest that a disaster risk reduction paradigm needs to critically engage with the subaltern sensibilities that sometimes treat disasters as not so negative happenings, and as opportunities for change: an issue highlighted by Rosenthal's (1998) analysis which

treats disasters as complex processes. The analysis in this chapter suggests that disasters and disaster risk reduction strategies need to be understood as discursive practices. As such disasters and disaster risk reduction strategies legitimize or question certain social claims. This analysis also draws on 'the subaltern' as a fluid notion. While on one hand, the subaltern constitutes the otherwise exploited and excluded in the context of the social relations at stake, in this chapter the subaltern also becomes a local generalised voice which questions certain hegemonic representations of nature, society and disasters generally informed by a technocratic world view of nature and society.

The chapter shows that to treat disasters as discursive practices is to bring in a critical reflexivity in the way in which disasters and risk reduction is approached, albeit informed by the social vulnerability approach, that includes a complexity analysis or a political ecology critique. It thus argues that what is needed is a continued search for a building of a society which critically engages with "social nature" by an epistemological reframing of an understanding of disaster, and which understands disaster risk reduction as a non-linear complex process committed to building ethical futures.

6.2 Disasters and social nature:

6.2.1 The concept of social nature:

Nature-Culture dualism has been one of the oppositions in the social science literature, with nature being associated with 'wildness' and 'culture' with human society, as though culture separated humans from nature (Pepper, 1996). In different political philosophies, and particularly those developed in the West, it was suggested that human society and culture evolved such that humans were able to master nature as well as become cultured beings. Thomas Hobbes suggested that primitive Man [sic] took the first step of separation from nature by creating a 'leviathan', a form of government which enabled human beings to survive and also master the 'wild' qualities of nature within itself (Hobbes, 1947).

The dominant western constructions related to human culture and nature in oppositional ways: as in classical Greek or Roman as well as in medieval times. In the West, the enlightenment ideal of human emancipation was connected with the idea of appropriating and controlling nature (Oliver-Smith, 2004). With this were posited different relationships between human culture and nature whose concerns were that of how to dominate the wildness of nature: how to tame it, how to master it. Science and technology were means

of asserting human superiority over other beings and a capitalist development meant the appropriation and exploitation of natural resources for the accumulation of capital. Merchant (1992) and Pepper (1996) contend that such approaches are based on a technocratic or mechanistic world-view of nature. Informed by a Newtonian science, this world view was “based on assumptions about nature consistent with certainty of physical laws and the symbolic power of machines” (Merchant, 1992, p. 48). The main assumption of this approach was that “knowledge, and [scientific] method make possible the human manipulation and control of nature” (ibid, p. 49)

Although a critique of capitalism, Harvey suggests that Marxism too emphasised the nature-culture distinction as a dialectical relation, where human labour played an important role in human evolution and enabled its separation from nature. Human beings were a part of nature but also evolved by the mastering of nature (which separated them from other beings). Human labour transformed nature and created goods for human consumption and use. In both a capitalist as well as a Marxist vision, nature was in abundance and its unbridled exploitation was necessary for the march of human development in general, and of science and technology in particular. Scientific progress *needed* the exploitation of nature; as also a separation of ‘I’ and ‘it’ that is humans and nature. The domination of nature as a “*process of creative destruction*” was implicit in both capitalist as well as Marxist formulations (Harvey, 1996 p. 122). The Enlightenment project, which considered critical thought and rationality as power and as means to shape life itself, was the core driving force of both capitalist as well as Marxist visions of development. These Enlightenment attitudes have shaped our attitude to our relationship to nature leading to a highly instrumental view of it: exploiting nature for human needs and overcoming human wants (Harvey 1996).

An influential critique of the instrumental view of nature also included the Frankfurt School of critical theory which argued for the replacement of the instrumental enlightenment rationality with another form of rationality – which was engaged in a dialogical relation with non-human others – the role of which was not to subdue or dominate nature, but to enable a deeper meaning of life without giving in to romantic versions of nature idolism. However, this critique by the Frankfurt School while questioning the domination of nature by humans instantiated rather than replaced the separation and continued the binary division of culture/nature in this formulation (Harvey 1996).

In other words, while the above different strands of ecological critiques questioned the domination of humans over nature, they continued to share with the Enlightenment tradition the same paradigm of separating human culture from nature. Thus they all continued within the dualistic paradigm of nature/culture.

Yet all through history, several voices have critiqued this instrumental view through a romantic view of nature represented by Rousseau, and later by Wordsworth and those currently identified with the 'ecocentric' movement (Merchant, 1992; Pepper, 1996). In its current form, the deep ecology critique argued that the wellbeing of nature as well as other non-human beings needed to be put at the centre of development strategy. Leading thinkers of the deep ecology movement such as Naess (Naess, 1989) have emphasized the relationship between humans and their environment; humans are a part of the environment and they form a relational system together. Naess proposed a way of living based on what he calls 'ecosophy' and self-realisation of the principle of "unity and diversity of life" (ibid, p. 163). He declares that "Ecosophy ties together all life and all nature" and that plants and animals too had "the *right to live*" (ibid, pp. 164-165). Another thinker, Lovelock, has put forward the *Gaia* thesis which treats earth as a 'complex single living organism' wherein its atmosphere or the biosphere have been actively affected by processes of life. Lovelock states "Life and its environment are so closely coupled that evolution concerns Gaia, not the organisms or the environment taken separately" (Lovelock, 1988 p.19).

The notion of *Gaia*, a greek goddess representing mother earth has also motivated some feminists to associate certain spiritual traditions with the celebration of the healing and positive power of the feminine and mother earth (Spretnak, 1990). Spretnak reclaims *Gaia* as a way to challenge the "patriarchal patterns of alienation, fear, enmity, aggression, and destruction"(Spretnak, 1982 p.573). Shiva makes a similar point when she shows how, in the context of Indian cosmology, nature is known by "*prakriti*" which is diverse, nurturing and creative. This *prakriti* is a result of "*shakti*" the feminine principle which governs the universe along with "*purusha*" the masculine principle (Shiva, 1989 p. 38). Shiva's analysis shows how the feminine principles were also subjugated as nature came to be dominated by a scientific modernity and a mechanical view, thus suggesting that domination of nature and domination of women needed to be analysed together. Identified with these views, is eco-feminism which argues for the recovery of the feminine as the ecological principle which emphasises harmony with nature and also a re-valorisation of

women. The eco-feminist thought is diverse, some strands of which emphasising the social and material (Mellor, 1997) rather than the cultural, spiritual or innate connections that women share with the nature (Merchant, 1992; Buckingham-Hatfield, 2000). Mellor (1997) in particular emphasises the material connections that women share with nature by using the concept of embodied selves. Mellor argues “the needs of human embodiment are shared by all humanity but are disproportionately borne in the bodies and lives of women.... [Ecofeminism brings] together the domination of nature with the domination of women” (Mellor, 1997 p.183-184). More generally, this has also led to a discourse connecting gender and environment, which has invited a critical inquiry into men and women’s differential perspectives and relation with nature and the need to take them into account in any development intervention (Buckingham-Hatfield, 2000).

The post-structuralist influence can also be seen in this debate with the deconstructionists arguing that such a separation of nature and culture, while an imaginary fiction, had concrete effects on the organization and practice of social life and were in need of destabilization. Donna Haraway, for example, argues against the fixing of the human/nature boundary which she suggests is transgressed all the time: that is, through our daily practices and the technologies inhabiting them. She argues that our discourses are about the ecology to which we ourselves belong, suggesting that there cannot be such a distinction between nature and culture. The only way to overcome or rather to engage with or destabilize the effects of the nature/culture dichotomy is to destabilize the language which constructs these meanings (Haraway, 1991).

Similarly, Latour in his book, “The Pasteurization of France” uses microbes as an example of nature which has reorganized society differently, suggesting that such manifestations of nature are social actors and need to be given a place in our epistemological framing of the nature vs society debate (Latour, 1988). Latour suggests that there is a blurring of boundaries between nature and culture and that the social changes nature, as much as nature changes the social.

Another influential thinker is Harvey (1996) who approaches nature as a discourse with heterogeneous lineages, each discourse producing its own notion of values to be ascribed to nature. Harvey takes the conflicting values ascribed to nature as “moments in a social process in which conflicting forms of social power struggle to gain command of institutions, social relations and material practices for particular purposes” (Harvey 1996, p

174). Harvey therefore argues that “different conceptions of nature get evoked for quite different political and substantive purposes within the overall flow of conflictual social action”. Discourses of nature therefore conceal political agendas, thus, Harvey suggests that “all critical examinations of the relation to nature are simultaneously critical examinations of society” (Harvey, 1996 p. 174). Harvey therefore introduces the concept of “created ecosystems” which entail not only ecological transformations of a place but also the social contradictions and social conflicts that arise as a result of these ecological transformations. Thus for Harvey these created or constructed ecosystems in each place have their own unique “historical geography of struggles over the social process ... through which environments have been transformed” (ibid, p. 185). Another concept used by Harvey is the idea of “constituted environment” to denote both social as well as ecological transformations of a place (ibid, p. 186).

These ways of thinking, ranging from ecocentric, ecofeminist to post-structuralist analysis, are attempts to overcome the nature/culture dichotomy or dualism. More recently, building upon the works of Haraway, Harvey and Latour; Castree and Braun have introduced the concept of “social nature” to overcome the nature-culture split: they also insist that nature and culture are “continuously constituted through the other – nature made artifactual, just as society is made natural” (Castree & Braun, 1998 p. 34).

In the following subsection I start by using the concept of social nature to interrogate the constructions of the disasters studied: namely, floods and erosion.

6.2.2 Flood and erosion: an inquiry into social nature?

The Ghagra sub-basin is a part of the Ganga basin with its catchment area partly lying in India, with the rest in Nepal (Government of India, 1980).

The Government of India report notes that ‘International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage’ (ICID) defines flood as “A relatively high flow or stage in a river, markedly higher than the usual; also the inundation of low land which may result there from. A body of water, rising swelling and over-flowing land not usually thus covered. Also a deluge ...”(Government of India 1980, p. 41). Using this general definition by the ICID, the Government of India defines ‘flooding’ as areas where “water due to rainfall and or river spill is not able to drain off as quickly as considered desirable” (ibid, p. 41). Locally,

people also describe a “flooded” river as one which overflows in to surrounding lands during rainy seasons.

Floods are also categorised as low level floods, medium level floods and high level floods by the administration. Low level floods are not damaging, since the water reaches only couple of feet, and may give benefits; medium level floods are up to 4 feet and could affect crops adversely; whilst high level floods, where the water is up to 5 feet or more, have a longer duration, which leads to high levels of crop and housing losses (Srivastava, Pandey & Singh, 2008). River water danger levels are prescribed by the Government for different villages, through the *baadh chowkis* where river water levels are measured every day, as in Baundi. The danger levels mark the entry of the river water into neighbouring lands as also indicate whether it is a low, medium or high level flood. In local parlance also, villagers distinguish between ‘*halki baadh*’ (lower level or smaller floods) and “*buda*” or “*sailaab*” (high level or major floods).

The *halki baadh* which visit the areas almost every year, are sometimes welcomed because of the rich silt and nutrient content that they bring in, which in turn helps agricultural productivity. People explained that the yield productivity on the flooded side of the *bandha*⁶⁶ was about one and half to two times more than that on its other side. The ‘*buda*’ or ‘*sailaab*’ in the local vocabulary refers to the entry of river water into the villages and houses beyond the surrounding agricultural lands. Thus, the local and official government indicators for declaring a flood situation are practically the same, although the language used is different.

Apart from flooding, the River Ghagra is also known for her erosion in the area. The Government of India report explains the causes in the following terms: “The river brings large quantity of silt during the floods and deposits the same in its bed due to poor bed slope and this results in the tendency to meander and consequent inundation of vast areas” (Government of India 1980, p. 33). A senior government engineer explained “The erosion is a natural phenomenon. This land is made of alluvial soil which contributes to the erosion. That is her [Ghagra’s] nature. She is following her natural behaviour” (state level senior engineer, December 2008). Another engineer in charge of building of anti-erosion works explained the process of erosion:

⁶⁶ *Bandha* refers to the Belha Behroli embankment.

“The river moves in a serpent like way. It does not travel in straight line. When the river bends, it does erosion and deposition. This is the natural law of river ... all Himalayan rivers do erosion and meandering. How can you change it? It is a complex process. River is like a living body system, very complex. Nobody can define it fully ... we cannot predict when and where it will do the erosion” (Bahraich District Engineer, December 2008).

Likewise, in the village, a common way of explaining the Ghagra’s erosion and deposition was, as Surat, a male aged 80, told me “Gangaji’s *kaam* (work) is to do *kataan* and *pataan*”. Prasad, aged 70 explained: “Every being has a natural character. That (doing *kataan* and *pataan*) is her nature”.

These views by senior engineers concerning the river’s “natural” meandering and eroding tendencies show similarities with those of the people from my researched villages. Both views resonate with each-other in so far as both emphasise the “natural” within the river. While the people refer to her “natural character or trait”, the official or governmental view describes her “natural tendency”. Such a similarity of views on the river’s eroding actions are also observed by Schmuck-Widman between the knowledge worlds of technical persons and the local *char*⁶⁷ people although seemingly different, due to the use of different tools to evaluate and work on their knowledge (technical persons use technical language, and tools; whilst the people using their practical experience), they nevertheless represent this phenomenon in similar ways (Schmuck-Widmann, 2001).

The above discussion points to the synergies of understanding floods and erosion from a local as well as a governmental perspective. The main indicator for declaring a flood situation a disaster is not just when a river flows over lands, but when its flow affects human settlements negatively. Erosion too becomes a disaster when it affects human settlements adversely. In other words, floods and erosion are conceptually understood through the complex lens of society-nature habitat: constituted over time. Further, the last chapter has illustrated how the local political economy has shaped the local socio-political landscape in the *reta* and the researched villages. Castree and Braun’s concept of social nature, enables an interrogation of the struggles over how the production of nature takes place and how our “interventions in nature proceed – along what lines, with what consequences and to whose benefit” (Castree and Braun 1998, p. 34). Indeed, the social formations in the *reta* and the researched villages can be better understood through the political ecology perspective: that is through the prism of land struggles, the migratory

⁶⁷ The small islands formed due to river deposition are called *Char* in Bangladesh.

settlement histories of people – namely *Purviyas* coming from the other parts of UP to settle in *reta* – and the state interventions or non interventions.

Another dimension which has affected the ‘social production of nature’ are the governmental technical strategies used to protect people from floods and erosion: as well as the adaptive strategies to flood and erosion nurtured by the people living along these rivers through their years of experience and the normative logic underlying these strategies. Thus together, the adaptive and governmental strategies, informed by the local political ecology, have shaped and changed the socio-political-ecological landscape of the area. In this sense, I suggest that a disaster (in this case both floods and erosion) can be said to be constituted by and through ‘social natures’. In the next section I explore this contested production of social nature as a complex habitat and the underlying notions of rights which have been mobilised to produce and contest it.

6.3 The production of social nature through strategies to reduce flood and erosion: examining the underlying notions of rights

6.3.1 The production of social nature and adaptive strategies

The oldest experience of flooding in the researched area recounted to me by people was the 1938 floods⁶⁸: that is, before the Belha-Behroli embankment was built. All those who have witnessed it, say that those floods have been unparalleled with any other floods experienced to date. Sidhu chacha, as he is fondly called in the village is now an elderly muslim man of 85 years and used to be village barber. He recounts the horrors of that flood:

“In those floods, 30-40 people from my village drowned away. All animals died too ... I and my family escaped by sitting in the *ladiya* [bullock cart made of wood]. I tied the *ladiya* to a tree around my house. As the water rose, so did the *ladiya*. The high flood waters remained in the village for three days. For three days I sat in the *ladiya* without food ...”(Sidhu, October 2008)

Another elderly man, Ambar from a intermediate caste, who is about 96 years today, remembered:

“River Ghagra was far away those days. She was about 4-5kos [12-15 km] away towards Rampur Mathura. There was no *bandha* [embankment] then, so water had gone upto long distances ... I have not seen floods as destructive as the *chayyalis*

⁶⁸ The district gazetteer of Bahraich also notes that the district was flooded severely in the year 1938 and the congress had then organised large-scale relief in the area (Government of UP, 1988:42)

[this is a *fasli* ⁶⁹year and translates to 1938 AD] floods. Several people in the villages were drowned in the floods. We just don't know how many died in this area. It was the most extraordinary floods I have ever seen in my life. I was a young boy then. I have never seen such floods again. Our village was *sahet-mahet* [completely destroyed] ... the water had suddenly entered the house in the middle of the night. We thought the floods waters will decrease, but it kept on increasing. By the middle of the night, the water level in the village had raised up to my chest" (Ambar, October 2008).

The next major floods experienced in public memory in the researched villages were the 1983 floods, and finally, the intermittent floods experienced between 2006 and 2008, the worst years being 2007 and 2008 - all of which were marked more by crop and housing destruction than deaths of people. The 2007 and 2008 floods were described by the people as a disaster. As Raghu, a male aged 35 with marginal land holdings and belonging to the scheduled caste suggested:

"*Sailab* [Major floods] means *Asamat* [disaster] ... it means be on a run. Otherwise you cannot survive. You have to go to the *bandha* [embankment] ... when our crops are ruined, and we lose everything, is it not an *asamat*? This year we had run away from our village at 3:00 clock in the night". (Raghu, October 2008)

Jairam, a man aged 60, said "*Baadh* [floods] is also called as *aapatti* [danger] or *achanak musibat* [sudden difficulty] which causes *sahetmahet* [complete destruction]". Going to *bandha* in the event of the flood or a receipt of flood warning is the last option exercised by the people, as it means leaving your house and all the goods in it unguarded. Indeed, a common strategy used by all the households – across all the castes – was to have one person in the household (and in many cases it was women) remain in the house in the village when surrounded by flood waters, whilst the rest went over to the *bandha* with the animals. The person who stayed behind managed by sitting on the specially built *atiya* (a high raised wooden platform used as a seat or a store for belongings) or on a cot raised high by placing bricks underneath. A *pihan*⁷⁰ was used to cook food, or days were passed by eating less or sometimes only once a day. In some cases, eating less food was due to not having enough rations in the house; in others, it was because people did not want to eat more as there were problems of going in to an open latrine space when there were flood waters in open space everywhere. A large number of women particularly emphasised the problem of going to open space latrines when flood waters were around.

⁶⁹ Fasli is the agricultural calendar year used earlier and is believed to be institutionalised in the land administration system of the district by Emperor Akbar. The Fasli year is still used by some older people in the village.

⁷⁰ A *pihan* is a small round platform made from mud which can be kept on a cot so that firewood can be lighted on it. A *pihan* is mainly used for cooking during flooding of the houses.

The Government had not used any strategies to deal with the erosion along the banks of the River Ghagra in the studied area, except as in the village of Baundi which was protected from erosion by spurs and studs. Anti-erosion works are only taken up on the banks of the river, where it is felt that the river would erode the embankment built for protection against floods. The main flood protection work undertaken by the Government in the area was the building of the embankment along the Ghagra called “Belha-Behroli” embankment or *bandha*⁷¹ in 1955-56 and is 95 km long. It was constructed as a strategy to protect areas from the flood waters of Ghagra. Other non-structural flood related works include, flood warnings, village boats kept for rescue.

The building of embankments has been one of the major post-independence policies followed by the Government of India to control the floods (Government of India, 1980). Thus the building of the Belha-Behroli embankment has created two areas on either side of the embankments, with villagers living inside the embankments being at a risk of flooding from the river as opposed to those staying outside the embankments, although they too get affected when the embankment gets broken at times or becomes waterlogged due to rain. The embankment has therefore too changed in certain ways the local landscape, the ecology, social relations and practices: thus leading to a production of social natures.

Whilst these works have been undertaken by the government to mitigate the effects of floods and erosion, alongside, people have developed local adaptive strategies, and have even benefitted from this social production of nature. Whilst the newly constructed landscape is politically charged, with the persons in influential positions accumulating disproportionate land on the *reta*, a large number of persons across castes also shared their stories about a number of erosions they have lived with before finally settling down on the *bandha*. Some had experienced as high as 7 to 14 displacements in their lives during their stay on the *reta*. Ramani, now aged 45, a woman belonging to the brahman caste had been staying on the *bandha* for four months when I met her, but a large part of her life was spent in mobility due to the erosion and deposition by the Ghagra. She commented:

“when there was a *kataan* [erosion] on this side of the river, we would go and stay on the other side, in *reta*. When she [Ghagra] would start eroding on the *reta* side, we would come and stay on this side of river. We have done this seven times. Then we had our lands to cultivate on either side of the river. Now all our lands are submerged. We don’t even have any land left to build a homestead”. (Ramani, October 2008)

⁷¹ I will be using embankment and *bandha* as interchangeable terms in the chapters.

Further, the land cultivation practices on the *reta* and potentially flooded lands are adapted according to the nature of the landscape. The *reta* lands were uneven due to deposition being higher on some parts, while shallow on the others. The shallow parts were flooded with water very easily in rains and the higher parts remained dry. Thus '*bowari*', that is the broadcasting of paddy seeds, which, requires less labour, was mainly practiced in such shallow lands, while '*ropai*', which included the transplantation of paddy seeds and was more labour intensive, was practiced on higher lands. Both yield outputs of grain proportionate to the labour invested. Similar adaptive strategies are also reported in the Eastern parts of Uttar Pradesh, where broadcasting of paddy is preferred to transplanting in certain areas ways in order to maximise the labour-output ratio: that is, depending upon the landscape in question (Yadav, 1999). Among other adaptive strategies used was that of choosing seeds and crops suited to the local topography. Higher and non-flood prone areas were preferred for growing lentils, whilst lower areas which were more flood prone for growing paddy: a water-loving crop. Further, the *jalmagna* paddy varieties (those loving more water) were chosen over those which needed less water in these shallow areas.

Thus the main adaptive strategies used in response to river erosion and deposition are: constant relocation of homestead – as per the deposition of the river - and changing of cultivation practices. These adaptations were made in villages which had undergone a number of erosions and depositions (such villages were considered to be in the river's *pet* [stomach]), as well as on lands under the newly-eroded researched villages. The researched villages – Ghagrapur, Mithapur, Laxmanpur and Baundi – were considered as having undergone the new erosions as all the villages were very old as per the local settlement history. Ghagrapur, for example was believed to be settled during the Emperor Akbar's rule which had extended up to Bahraich. The village Ghagrapur was therefore considered to be about 400-450 years old, when it was eroded by the river. All other villages such as Baundi were considered to be old or even older.

Other adaptive strategies included raising the levels of newly built *pucca* or brick houses in the villages: guided by public memory of previous river water levels. Even the mud or thatched houses which mainly belonged to poor and marginalised groups were found to be elevated by building higher mud platforms in most of the villages. Thus local adaptive strategies to floods and erosion produce nature in particular ways, so that the risks and the effects of floods and erosion effects for humans are minimized, and sometimes even become beneficial to them. These strategies are intermingled with an awareness that they

are not foolproof solutions to destructive floods. *Living with the uncertainty* of being visited by the destructive flooding and erosion of the Ghagra and – living with the beneficial effects of floods constitute that awareness that is a necessary part of all local adaptive strategies.

6.3.2 The contested production of social nature through governmental flood reduction strategies and notions of rights

The building of embankments as protection from floods has been criticized by certain environmental groups in India. The third citizen's report by the Centre for Science and Environment, a leading environmental non-governmental organisation (NGO) in India argues that the wide-spread technocratic strategies of building embankments or dam reservoirs have led to an increase of flooding (Agarwal & Chak, 1991). Embankments, they argued, disrupted the natural drainage system in the flood plains. Rather, a way forward should be to learn from local wisdom: that is local adaptation practices should be encouraged. They suggested that the best strategy that could be followed was to allow the natural drainage of the rivers, thus encourage a way of 'living with floods' (Agarwal et al 1991). The local NGOs in Bahraich also argue that the embankment is more of a problem than a solution as it leads to the "obstruction of the free flow of water leading to floods" and thus contributes to further flooding (Focus Group Discussion with NGOs, October 2008). They suggest that local people's adaptive strategies, some of which are described in the earlier subsection, are the best flood protection mechanisms, and better including than other technical strategies such as the de-silting of the river. Other scholars, such as Zaman, have also critiqued a technocratic focus on flood management and suggested that living with the floods was the better strategy (Zaman, 1993).

Despite this widespread critique of embankments by the NGOs, leading academicians and environmental groups, people's own perception of the Belha-Behrauli *bandha* was found to be mixed. A few – who were mainly large land owners⁷², and who had seen the pre-embankment days – emphasised that before the embankment, the flood waters would spread across long distances and did not cause so much of damage as of now in their fields. For example, Namansingh, an older man now aged 70 and belonging to the thakur caste, and a large land owner, states "since the building of the *bandha* we are facing difficulty. The *bandha* has made us very vulnerable to floods". Other marginal farmers such as

⁷² See footnote number 63

Narayan, a man aged 38 years, belonging to an intermediate gudiya caste, suggested that development activities, such as the building of the roads in the villages had contributed to the obstruction of the natural water flow, which was leading to a greater accumulation of water, than had previously been observed, in certain fields.

Notwithstanding the criticism of *bandha* by the large land owners, for many marginal farmers, and landless labourers, the *bandha* was a source of great solace. As Zubeida, a 75 year old muslim woman and a landless labourer summarised “may-be there is a loss on our side of the *bandha*, but at least the agricultural lands on the other side are safe ... If there is a produce somewhere, we will be able to buy and eat it”. Agricultural fields on the other side of the *bandha*, when protected from destructive floods, also provided employment to many of the landless labourers or marginal farmers like Zubeida’s family. Further, hundreds of households who were displaced from researched villages due to erosion by the Ghagra were staying on the *bandha*, as a last resort. In the words of Noorjahan, a 35 year old Muslim woman, staying on *bandha*, after her one acre land was eroded, “We are okay only due to *bandha*. Had *bandha* not been there, where would we have stayed? This is a *Sarkari* (Government) *bandha*. We can live or do anything here, nobody can say anything to us”. This also points to the special vulnerability faced by poorer families, who cannot afford to buy lands even for homestead purposes when their villages, lands and houses are eroded by Ghagra as opposed to those landed households, who are in a position to buy inland lands elsewhere and build houses. Families living on the *bandha* recounted stories of difficulty and threat they sometimes faced from landed families around the *bandha* when they tried to plant trees or go to a latrine in the surrounding lands. In fact, one of the major demands of the households living on the *bandha* is that the government give them a legal right to build their houses on the lower slopes of Government owned Belha-Behroli embankment (FGD men, October 2008). Although having a minuscule presence in my researched villages, some of the persons displaced due to erosion have formed a local organisation of displaced persons with the help of a local NGO, the Panchasheel Trust, and are lobbying the government for their rehabilitation.

The above assessment of state-promoted flood protection strategies, used to reduce the risks of flood disaster and its impact, show that not-with-standing the differences in their critique or support of flood protection measures, by government, NGOs and local people, there are underlying similarities. All assessments have used, despite their differences, *utilitarian normative standards* to either support or critique the flood response. Generally

speaking, the utilitarian calculations are based on answers to the question ‘To what extent does a particular intervention lead to the happiness of people?’ In government policy, when utilitarian standards are applied, every person at risk of floods is taken as representing one unit of happiness, and the measure which contributes to the highest aggregates of happiness may be selected. Thus from a government perspective, the building of the *bandha* or the embankment has the clear utilitarian rationale of promoting the happiness and wellbeing of the largest number of people: that is of those who live outside the embankment, as opposed to the comparatively smaller number of people and villages living inside the embankment. The government estimates that the building of the Belha Behroli embankment protects 1.14 million hectares of agricultural lands. The NGOs, although critical of the *bandha*, also apply utilitarian normative standards via the cost-benefit model of assessing alternative options and suggesting that such options are more suitable than the *bandha* in furthering the happiness and well-being of people. For example, Agarwal et al (1991) have recommended the use of flood plain and, water shed management as a suitable technical solution to accompany strategies such as living with floods; whilst the NGOs from Bahraich have suggested, for example, a plan-based development, or a stone bunding on either side of the river, to tackle floods and erosion (Focus Group Discussion with NGOs, October 2008). Thus the technical alternatives suggested by the NGOs are, like the building of the *bandha* by the government, also derived from a utilitarian logic. A similar utilitarian logic was applied by villager in their assessment of the *bandha*: whereas landed families found it detrimental to their wellbeing by affecting their fields negatively, landless or marginal farming families found that *bandha* protected at least some livelihood and housing options for them. In other words, the normative yardstick used by both the government and its critics or supporters are similar: although they lead to different solutions, depending upon the criteria for measuring/assessing the utility of the intervention, and for whom the intervention is beneficial. Further, at the heart of the interventions by the government and its supporters, or of those proposed by its critics, is the idea of protecting human interest, such as human happiness, and as such it follows an anthropocentric perspective on rights governed by utilitarian ethics.

The above discussion shows that underlying the normative discourse informing technical strategies such as the *bandha* are contestations over “whose human interest” is being met through the governmental flood risk reduction strategy. The governmental flood risk

reduction strategy, in this case, the building of the embankment, thus became implicated in the constructions and contestations over access to “rights”: that is to resources, such as land, to livelihoods and housing in the area. In other words, the governmental strategies of flood risk reduction have led to a contested production of social nature which in turn has led to contestations over the right to resources under the guise of ‘whose human interest’ is being met by the governmental flood risk reduction strategy. There is thus a need to keep such critical questioning alive whilst assessing how social nature is produced and whose interests and rights are being promoted by the governmental strategies in the process.

6.3.3. The production of social nature due to governmental strategies of erosion reduction and the notions of rights

Baundi village is often referred to by the prefix of *Raja* and called *Raja Baundi* by its residents and neighbouring villages. *Raja Baundi* is an important part of local history, has a place of pride amongst the residents of *Baundi* and neighbouring villages, which were earlier a part of the *Baundi riyasat*. This local history of *Raja Baundi* has had important implication for the governmental interventions undertaken in the area to control the erosion of River Ghagra on one hand and on the other, also has associations with the local myths and stories about the reasons behind the eroding tendencies of River Ghagra.

The *Raja Baundi riyasat*⁷³ was ruled by Raja Hardutt Sawai, (the last ruler of Baundi riyasat) during the 1857 mutiny in the kingdom of Oudh. In 1856, the British East India Company annexed Oudh and took over Lucknow, the capital of Oudh kingdom from the Nawab of Lucknow Wajid Ali Shah who was imprisoned after the annexation. Begum Hazarat Mahal, the queen of the Nawab, with the support of local rajas mobilised a popular uprising against this annexation, which continued all through 1857 till it was crushed by the East India Company Army with the help of other Indian princes. During this uprising, Begam Hazarat Mahal took refuge in the *Baundi riyasat* and stayed in the fort of *Baundi* for some days. As *Baundi riyasat* had allied with the queen and given refuge to her in the fort, it led to the battle of *Chinhat*, a place between Barabanki and Lucknow, in which the troops of *Raja Baundi* and other *Rajas* clashed with the East India Company Army but were defeated. The battle of *Chinhat* is also fondly remembered by local villagers for the valiant fight put up by Raja Virbhadrasingh, a young 18 year old prince from the

⁷³ The kingdom of Oudh (last ruled by the Nawab Wajid Ali Shah before British Annexation) was divided further into local princely estates called riyasats, which were ruled by local princes.

neighbouring *Chilhari riyasat*, (and a relative of Hardutt Sawai, both belonging to the common *Raikwari khandaan*⁷⁴) who as the local fable goes, is said to have fought the British army for three days in the battle field even after his head was cut off. After this defeat, Hardutt Sawai is said to have fled along with Begam Hazarat Mahal to the hills of neighbouring Nepal, after which his whereabouts, villagers say, are not known. However, he, is believed by villagers to have died as they wandered through the hills attempting to avoid attacks from and capture by the marching British army⁷⁵. Thus, *Raja Baundi*, and its fort signifies the history of resistance to the British colonial regime in the local as well as the Indian state's narratives. As such, *Raja Baundi* and its fort occupy an important place in the local history.

In 2004, the River Ghagra, after eroding Baundi's surrounding *purva*, or hamlets, had advanced towards Baundi enough to erode the fort and the entire main village. This led to a flurry of activity, including a political mobilisation of the village elite, who lobbied the local MLAs, MPs and the state as well as the Central Government⁷⁶ for the saving of Baundi, and its fort: which symbolized a history of resistance. Thus three spurs and a stud (as noted in the Introduction chapter) have been erected which have halted the erosion of the main village of Baundi and its fort. In this instance, given the historical importance of Baundi, the building of the stud and spurs can be seen as responses arising from a normative logic of intrinsic value: that is, where a particular object is valued for its own sake and what it symbolizes, rather than for its economic or instrumental value derived from a cost-benefit calculation. However, as Baundi fort or its history cannot be said to have an intrinsic interest of its own, the value attached to Baundi is linked with the human interest and welfare of not only the people of Baundi but also, due to its symbolic status, of

⁷⁴ Khandaan means a common bloodline or ancestors; in this case the ancestry is mapped through two *Raikwar* brothers, Saldeo and Baldeo who were made Rajah's for Baundi and Rampur Riyasat, by the ousted Lucknow Nawab's ancestors. As their heirs increased, three more riyasats were carved from these two riyasats, namely Ramnagar, Chilhari, and Malhanpur. These five riyasats, Baundi, Rampur, Ramnagar, Chilhari and Malhanpur belonging to Raikwari Khandaan had supported Begam Hazarat Mahal in her uprising and jointly battled with the British army and its allies in the battle of Chinhath in 1857 (as narrated by the Pradhan of Baundi, one of the last remaining heirs of Raikwar families in Baundi, November 2008). This information has also been confirmed by the Gazetteer of the province of Oudh: see Benett (1993)[1877-78]

⁷⁵ The way in which Raja Hardutt Sawai died is a matter of dispute. The Gazetteer of the Province of Oudh states he "died at Port Blair" (Benett, W.C 1993[1877-78], p. 121; however this is disputed by the Pradhan of Baundi, who says that he was never captured by the British and therefore could not have died at Port Blair jail.

⁷⁶ Several eminent politicians, such as then UP chief minister Rajnath singh; and Motilal Vora representing Central government, visited Baundi and led discussions in UP assembly and the Indian Parliament on saving Baundi and its fort through the anti-erosion works. See Times of India (2001) 'Soil Erosion may wash Raja Baundi Palace', *Times of India, Lucknow*, August 14.

the UP State: as such, it follows a utilitarian logic. Thus here too anthropocentric normative standards – namely, protection of human interest – are applied in order to arrive at a particular technical intervention for reducing the risks of erosion in Baundi.

Yet in popular belief, this halting of the Ghagra at Baundi is also viewed with a certain scepticism. That is, this is where the local narratives around Ghagra come to life to play a dominant role in the way in which ‘disasters’ such as erosion are constructed and its impacts understood through local and subaltern lenses. I engage with these local discourses around the Ghagra which, I suggest, offer another normative lens, as against the statist one, through which disasters, their impacts, and the way in which they are played out, are understood. Moreover, these local and subaltern discourses maintain an ambivalent relation with the statist technical solutions to the erosion – never quite agreeing with them fully – by giving a semi-autonomous field of agency to the River Ghagra. Consider the following by Mahesh, aged 30 a teacher by occupation, and belonging to a scheduled caste:

“She [River Ghagra, also called Ganga locally] will certainly erode Raja Baundi one day, for sure. Wherever there is *maaya* [wealth], like silver, gold, and money, she goes there and takes it in her *pet* [stomach]. The well in the fort of Raja Baundi has a lot of wealth which was left behind by the Raja. Only after taking in this wealth will she go away. Till then she will continue to be around, doing *kataan* ... If the fort is eroded, the river will go away on its own. And because, the government is stopping its erosion, it is eroding the neighbouring villages. But she will surely erode the fort one day. The *maaya* in the fort is now *jeevdhari* which means that it belongs to no-one now, and has now taken a life of its own. In the night, one can hear the noise from this well inside the fort ... And it is this *maaya* which is attracting Gangaji ”⁷⁷ (Mahesh, October 2008)

The popular belief in the area is that Hardutt Sawai, when he left with the Begum Hazarat Mahal for Nepal, had put his wealth – which included his crown, gold and silver – in a well inside the fort. Now this Raja’s wealth belongs to no-one, not even his heir, as he had not willed it to them. Thus no person can enjoy that wealth, and it calls for its restoration to no-one: the River Ghagra is only doing this through the erosion of Baundi.

Similar stories were narrated about how when the villages of Ghagrapur and Mithapur were eroded in 1952 and 1999 respectively; silver and gold coins which were kept in jars and buried in these village lands, went into the river with the erosion. This wealth which Ghagra took away, people also asserted, did not belong to anyone and hence was taken away by the river with erosion of the land. In Ghagrapur, the belief was that some teli (oil

⁷⁷ The River Ghagra in popular parlance is called Ganga in the local areas and the researched villages.

millers) families in the village had wrongly appropriated the wealth from Begam Hazrat Mahal and Hardutt Sawai, when they left for Nepal. Whilst loading the silver and gold coins on the horses, they had stolen some of the coins, and, through erosion, eventually this wealth was returned to Ghagra. In Mithapur it was believed that wealth was buried in the ground by *Bharras*⁷⁸ or some other people many many years ago, and only during the village *kataan*, did people in the village come to know about this buried wealth: since they saw it being swallowed by the river.

Thus there was a generalised narrative that the River Ghagra was only taking in the wealth which belonged to no-one and thus could not be rightfully enjoyed by anybody else. Thus, the Ghagra's erosion was interpreted by local people according to their own system of morality: that is of what in the acquisition and enjoyment of wealth, is 'right' and 'wrong'.

This general narrative which linked entitlements to wealth with river erosion also had individualised narrative twists: such as the persons from former untouchable groups claiming that the river, by eroding the lands of these villages, had only ensured justice. Laxman, a male aged 36 from a phasi, a scheduled caste, left with a marginal land holding after the erosion, asked:

"Why did the river erode my village if there were no exploitative people here? ... if you have stolen wealth from others, the village is bound to be eroded. How can it remain unaffected? That is why *Gangaji* has done the *kataan* [erosion] of our village. The thakurs from our villages own lands up to 9-10 km over here. When their wealth increased, so did their *ahankar* [egoism or vanity]. She [Ghagra] is breaking their *ahankar* by taking away their lands ... Surely there is some *paap* [bad deed] in the village. Otherwise why are agricultural lands eroded?" (Laxman, November 2008).

The *phasis* maintained that poor people or marginal farmers like themselves, were also dragged into this process as innocent victims in order to teaching these vain and exploitative rich people a lesson.

Another story told to me on other occasions about the erosion attributed Ghagra's meandering ways to her not being married and that gave her the freedom of will to flow wherever she wanted. Although this story can be interpreted in many ways, I would like to understand it from a feminist point of view. This story was first told to me by Laxmi, a landless woman aged 60 from an intermediate caste, whom I later came to know very well. She was living alone in her natal village (Ghagrapur), as she had left her husband several

⁷⁸ Bharras are considered to be one of the original inhabitants of the place.

years ago, unwilling to put up with what she called “wrong behaviour”. The story of Ghagra recited by Laxmi could be understood as her resistant narrative to the patriarchal norms and values which Laxmi herself had broken in her personal life. In that sense the story of Ghagra’s erosion also posited her critique of the patriarchal social relations in the area.

As a narrative, the disaster of the land erosion was understood within a frame of moral critique: specific moral lessons had to be learnt from erosion and floods. Rationalists have in general looked down upon such notions in relation to disasters and attributed them to the traditional “fatalism” of the community. My reading suggests that the reasons ascribed to the erosion are far from fatalistic; and arise from a moral economy which includes ideas around an ‘ethical conduct of living’. Further, they represent a public discourse – often told in the form of stories – which challenge unethical, immoral and exploitative ways of gaining wealth, or alternatively represent a critique of patriarchal social relations. Thus this perspective can also be understood as representing the politics of the subaltern groups – in this case the former untouchables and women – and as resistant discourses responding to relationships of power and powerlessness. Thus the understanding of disasters needs to be located within the local politico-moral economy within which disasters take place. In this analysis, the River Ghagra, is given agency, on one hand in the making of the disaster, and, on the other, in the pursuit of justice or morality.

From an ethical perspective, the public and subaltern interpretations of erosion also signify the ethical relations that nature has with human beings: in so far as the River Ghagra demands ethical actions from us, on one hand, and between human beings on the other (Larsen, 2006). In the above analysis, the politico-moral interpretation of disaster suggests that disaster risk reduction, if understood through these lenses, *cannot be guaranteed* through technical solutions such as spurs or studs; and therefore is not the most sustainable solution. Rather it requires an ethical conduct between human beings and between human beings and nature. Further, since it is the moral content of the relationships which makes them ethical – the local belief systems is far from being merely irrational, fatalistic or superstitious, since in politico-moral terms, they have precise discursive implications for norms of behaviour and conduct.

Taken further, this politico-moral consideration can be mobilised for a positive social transformative agenda through local political action. Mahatma Gandhi in India after the

West Bengal Earthquake in 1934 had suggested that the earthquake was a result of sins of untouchability by the upper-castes and mobilised the occasion for a public critique of untouchability and calling for its social transformation. Gandhi called the earthquake “a divine chastisement” for “the great sin” as a result of the practice of untouchability by the upper castes, a “calamity handed down ... from century to century” (Gandhi, 2008 p. 362). Although Gandhi was severely criticised by Tagore and other Rationalists for what they thought was a spreading of superstitious beliefs, Gandhi did not retract his statements. Gandhi stated “let us get rid of the distinctions of high and low, purify our hearts, and be ready to face our Maker when an earthquake or some natural calamity or death in the ordinary course overtakes us” (Gandhi, 2008, p. 363) Gandhi’s philosophy of Satyagraha was rooted in the belief that non-violent suffering against injustice makes the injustice even more visible and immoral. The suffering caused by the earthquake – and that too by several innocent persons – only made untouchability even more immoral. In the field area of Bahraich, the public and subaltern politico-moral critique of the disaster can also be viewed as a discursive critique of exploitative social relations existing in the area. In other words, the production of social nature was treated as a discursive process where a public and subaltern rights discourse was used to critique the exploitative social relations in the area. Disasters thus act as discursive practices. Here, I use discursive practices as a concept to denote that words are not just representations. Thus the importance of the spoken word – in this case narratives about disasters – lies not in its meaning per se, but in its contextual use: that is, under what conditions are words used and for what effect? (Foucault, 1989; Parker, 2004) In the next subsection I analyse how this discursive process also forms a further public or subaltern critique of governmental technocratic strategy, which seeks to control nature by proposing an alternative world-view of human-nature and human-human relations.

6.3.4 Disaster risk reduction as discursive process: a public and subaltern proposal of normative ethics for a guiding human-nature and human-human relations

As analysed in the earlier subsection, while the government solution of building spurs and studs at Baundi is a part of the utilitarian and anthropocentric ethic and logic to save the historical place called Baundi from riverine erosion, the local and subaltern interpretation of erosion as a disaster sees the solution of controlling nature as unsustainable. Nature (the River Ghagra) demands ethical actions from us. Further, nature follows its own ethics of behaviour which is independent of assumed human judgement and ethics. This formulation

of nature and the river, suggests that the risk reduction strategies such as spurs and studs, cannot *only* be judged on the basis of anthropocentric goals or interests. Nature's interest and also its will should be taken into account. Also, nature's will is considered unknowable for a human being as the following statements about the will of Ghagra suggest:

"If she wishes, she can make you a *raja* [king, and if she wishes she can make you a *fakir* [mendicant]. If she does *kataan* [erosion] your way, you become a fakir, but if she puts clay soil on your land, then you have fertile lands (Ambar, male, aged 96 November 2008)

"She goes as per her will and wish. Till the time her *man* [mind/wish] changes, she will stay here. When she leaves a place, she leaves behind a small *soti* [a tiny river or drainage]. When she decides or wills to leave, she enters this *soti*; and covers long distances without much time and leave behind *pataan* [deposition]. She goes as further as she wants. And when she feels like returning she does so" (Vishal, male, aged 75, December 2008)

Like earlier representations, this representation of the River Ghagra arises from a world view which suggests that nature per se cannot be controlled or ruled through the actions of human beings. Nor is nature static; it has its own rhythm and life, and follows its own ethics. Further, it is a complex live entity in its own way whose actions are fundamentally indeterminate to human beings. It is humans who may have to adjust to the natural phenomenon: in this case the river and her meandering ways. Moreover, in this view of the nature-human interaction, villagers and subaltern groups recognise themselves as a part of social nature (as opposed to nature/culture dualism), as neither nature nor social is given an ontological primacy in the construction of a disaster but rather both are understood in and through their interactions.

Other ways in which erosion was explained to me were:

"The way we stay in our house, *Gangaji* [another local name for Ghagra] too is staying in her house. The way we do *khetipati* [agricultural work], she too is doing the same through *kataan* and *pataan* in her own house" (Savitri, female, from luniya, an intermediate caste, aged 45, November 2008).

"Where will Gangaji go? She stays within the radius of 12 km doing *kataan* and *pataan* within this space. People come and go but *Gangaji's* life has been spent in this approximately 12 km space" (Rubar, Brahman, male aged 65, August 2008)

This explanation of erosion, not only suggests that nature (the River Ghagra) follows her own nature or will, when she does erosion and deposition, but also that this is where her rightful abode is, and all that she is doing is her 'work' in her rightful abode. In this thinking, is the people's recognition that the river's belongingness to her environment is

rightful, as also is the impact of her actions on their lives. As Lalu, a thakur male aged 50, who has lost all his lands in erosion says, “The destiny of this village changes and is made or unmade with the river. One day it will be fine again” (Lalu, December 2008). Thus the interaction between river and people (nature-people) is recognised as an ongoing journey whose outcome is unknown. The right of the nature (River Ghagra) to exist and to follow her nature and work, and the rights of the people who live in her vicinity, find their balance through a continuous interaction: between humans and humans, an effect of political ecology, and humans and nature, an effect of an indeterminate ethic.

To summarise this section, the analysis shows that the erosion and the solutions to prevent it – such as technological interventions by the state – are assessed through discourses of multiple normative standards: on the one hand as a result of the intervention of the state motivated through utilitarian normative outcomes; on the other, as a normative critique of the exploitative and patriarchal social relationships in the area, or as an outcome of the interaction between nature and humans, that is an indeterminate normative ethic. Thus the production of social nature and of disaster risk reduction strategies emerge as components of a discursive process where different voices in the researched village contest governmental strategies as the only solution by proposing an alternative ethic towards human-nature and human-human relations. The following of this alternative ethic calls for ethical social relations as well as ethical ways of relating to nature. Thus in this alternative local and subaltern view, neither a wholly anthropocentric nor an ecocentric ethic has an ontological primacy. The question therefore is: ‘What place should be given to this proposed alternative ethic in any search for disaster risk reduction strategies?’ And if so, ‘To what extent does this local and subaltern call for an alternative ethic resonate with the theoretical or philosophical claims made by the social theories engaging with these questions?’.

6.4 Social theory and the anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric views of disasters: implications for disaster risk reduction and a new paradigm of rights

I start with a discussion on notions of environmental ethics in social theory, which reflect on the issues of nature’s interest and rationality. While ‘wellbeing’ and ‘interest’ have traditionally been invoked for human beings, more recently, certain philosophical interpretations have extended them to non-human beings. The extension of these values to non-human beings ranges from animals (Regan & Singer, 1989; Singer, 1995; Regan,

2004); through other forms of life such as plants and trees; to non-living beings such as lakes, mountains, rivers: although certain religious and spiritual traditions, such as Hindu, Buddhist, Jain⁷⁹ attribute consciousness to all organisms and natural phenomenon, living and non living.

For Feinberg cited in Des Jardins (2001), higher animals have rights, while lower level animals such as pests do not (Des Jardins, 2001 p. 105). Singer (1995) and Regan (2004) suggest that some animals have an interest like human beings as they have a capacity to suffer: as opposed to, for example, insects or invertebrates. Thus all sentient beings need to be treated with compassion, and as moral beings with rights. Taylor also argues for a consideration of the wellbeing of other non-human living beings on the grounds that we all belong to the same earth community (Taylor, 1986). This is often referred to as a bio-centric ethic. Des Jardins summarises this bio-centric ethic as arising from the belief that all species have an interdependency as part of the earth community. All pursue their own good, and human beings should not be treated as morally superior beings to others: on this premise is based our human duty not to harm other living organisms. However, he argues that the real problem with the bio-centric ethic begins when the interest of other living organisms conflicts with the human interest. (Des Jardins 2001)

For Christopher Stone, forests, trees, oceans and rivers as natural objects can have legal rights. Stone suggests that a discourse of rights has evolved over time, and that it is time that human beings granted natural objects a certain worth and dignity of their own rather than relating to them solely out of a self-centred human interest (Stone, 1974). Further, as discussed earlier, ecocentric theorists believe that all living and non-living beings are a part of the ecosystem and contribute to a well being of each-other: as such, ethics demands that we respect these parts since they contribute to a harmonious whole. While the bio-centric view may exclude mountains, lakes, or rivers, an ecocentric view would study the ways in which living and non-living environments interact and contribute to the wellbeing of each-other. One of the leading proponents of the ecocentric ethic, Leopold, encompasses a much wider notion of species into his ecological community: for example, water, plants, and soil are included along with animals and birds, which in turn are granted biotic rights as members of the biotic community. Leopold asserts “The land is one organism. Its parts,

⁷⁹ The Hindu, Buddhist and Jain religions have notions of consciousness which are extended to the universe and all that it holds. In this view, all living and nonliving beings are a part of the same universal consciousness. The Hindu as well as Muslim families of my researched villages believed in the consciousness and the will of the River Ghagra.

like our own parts, compete with each other and co-operate with each other. The competitions are as much a part of the inner workings as the co-operations”(Leopold, 1970 p. 190). The survival of the biotic community is dependent upon the balance of the whole. This leads Leopold to argue for a land ethic which “affirm[s] [biotic communities] right to continued existence ... their continued existence in a natural state (ibid, p. 240). On the question of land use, Leopold further goes on to say “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise” (ibid, p. 262). Other scholars such as Callicott have further critically interpreted Leopold’s insights to outline the human obligation towards environment. Callicott regards these obligations as analogous to rings in a tree. Each ring represents a human commitment which ranges from that towards one’s family to the outermost ring which represents the ecological system as a whole (Callicott, 1987).

Both of the above, the biocentric and the ecocentric normative tradition also hold on to a non-anthropocentric view of rights, as both suggest that beings of nature such as mountains, rivers and animals (ecocentric view), or beings such as animals (biocentric view) have a moral standing and ought to be granted moral rights. Certain strands of biocentric and ecocentric normative traditions have been criticised by southern environmentalists such as Guha for unequally burdening the poor from developing countries, or marginalised groups such as indigenous peoples across the world to maintain this ecological balance and well-being although they may not have contributed to its degradation (Guha, 1989).

Des Jardins argues that nature’s complexity underlies the ecocentric ethic and makes it fundamentally impossible for human beings to understand this complex web of inter-relationships between parts of any ecological whole and to therefore suggest any one definitive rule for response. Thus the ecocentric view recognises a “morally complex world” with certain acts being “both right in one way and wrong in another way” (Des Jardins, 2001 p. 197). This makes ecological ethics fundamentally indeterminate. Leopold, one of the main proponents of the ecocentric view himself moved to this position in his later years (Des Jardins 2001). In my view, this interpretation of ecological ethics considers complexity and uncertainty as essential features of interactions between living and non-living entities within any ecology. This can be considered similar to the understanding of erosion as an outcome of an indeterminate nature-social ethic or as a rationale for the sceptical uncertainty felt by the people and the subaltern classes in their

assessment of the outcome of any technocratic intervention to erosion. Yet, to the extent that the local people and subaltern classes look at the nature-social relation as a mutually constitutive one, it also moves away from the conservation of a 'wilderness' or 'natural state' ethic proposed by deep ecologists such as Leopold and Naess. Rather, I suggest that this local view of nature-social relation and the normative ethics proposed by people and subaltern groups resonate with Latour's critique of the way traditional political ecology including ecocentrism has approached the question of nature and society.

Latour argues that nature is not a given social reality but is constructed by social theories that identify a political divide between nature and society. Latour does away with the separation of the nature (as signifying non-human collective) from the social (as signifying the human collective), critiquing it as a problematic Western epistemological division and insists on a "singular collective" built of "associations of humans and nonhumans" (Latour, 2004a p. 43). Latour observes that non-western cultures offer "indispensable alternatives", when "they *refuse to use only two collectors*, just one of which, the social world, would be seen as political, while the other, nature, would remain outside of power, outside public speech, outside institutions, outside humanity, outside politics" (ibid, pp. 43-44). Latour argues that unlike the Western preoccupation with the nature-social divide, non-Western cultures "*were unconcerned by the distinction*" made by Western epistemology as non-Western cultures have never separated nature from their collective (ibid, pp. 45-46). What is therefore seen in the researched area, is as Latour argues, an ethical perspective which is built from "associations of humans and non humans" (ibid, p. 43). What is the implication of this insight for disaster risk reduction strategies?

The hazards paradigm believes that nature is knowable and therefore controllable: but through local lenses such a belief is viewed with considerable scepticism. The social vulnerability paradigm considers natural hazard however focuses analytically on the root causes or social factors which can increase or decrease social vulnerability. Within the broad social vulnerability approach, the political ecology paradigm looks at the way nature is produced through social and political power or the geographies of power. Following Latour, and looking from a local as well as subaltern interpretive perspective, the natural hazards approach and the social vulnerability approach (which includes the political ecology approach), cannot fully explain the disaster outcomes and at most explains it in partial terms. Further, this local and subaltern interpretation does suggest that humans cannot master or control all that they desire: that technological science is no foolproof

answer to all our questions: that the science of disaster risk reduction in itself needs to acknowledge that we do not have all the solutions, and that part of the challenge is to engage with the complexity which includes ‘human as well as non-human associations’.

6.5 So where do we go from here? :some concluding remarks

The analysis from the field has shown that disasters play a discursive role in society. Firstly, as in the researched villages, disasters serve as occasions for people to legitimize or critique certain social claims which have material effects: that is economic gains (wealth, access to lands, housing, wages, livelihoods), or social control (patriarchal or exploitative social relations). Secondly, disaster risk reduction strategies initiated by the state also get implicated in these claims and counter claims: as we have seen in the case of the critique of, as well as the support given to, the building of the embankment or of the spurs and stud at Baundi. Thus, social constructs of what constitute *legitimate* entitlements or rights are played out as dominant or resistant discourses in and through disasters as well as in and through disaster risk reduction strategies. As social critiques, they also represent a *social re-ordering in the making* that is proposing possible ways in which societies could change.

The analysis also shows that the subaltern and local critiques of the technocratic solutions resonate with Latour’s insight: namely the need to build solutions from the association between humans and non-humans. This has implications for the disaster risk reduction strategies. In the first instance, what they suggest is the need for a more complex theory to understand and respond to a disaster. Complexity theory (Hilhorst, 2004) argues for a need to take into account the multiple realities characterizing the complexity of interactions between different actors – government agents, people, experts – who interpret disasters in different ways through multiple normative standards. Building upon Latour (2004a and 2004b), I suggest that these complex social interactions and discussions – between local people(s) (women and men belonging to different castes, class and religion)⁸⁰, government representatives, NGOs, and technical experts: that is all of whom who claim to know the problem of floods and erosion and in the process ‘represent’ the River Ghagra – may be treated as “matters of concern” (Latour, 2004b p. 232) and used to assessing disasters and risk reduction strategies. Latour contends that the notion of “matters of concern” adds

⁸⁰ I take into account the main critique of eco-feminist discourse which suggests that all perspectives and solutions need to be understood through gendered lenses. Thus I too emphasise the need to include the different perspectives of women and men of different social groups (caste, class) into any search for an ethically just solution.

social reality to the technical experts (such as economists, engineers) analysis and enables a crossover between experts knowledge and the social knowledge (such as that of diverse voices within local communities, NGOs, policy makers) about nature. This suggests that advocacy models proposing disaster risk reduction strategies in any disaster need to be far more reflexive about the effects of their practices, and about the conscious or unconscious alliances they may be making with these different social actors.

Like Beck's risk society, where risks become known only after the effects of modernity have emerged – that is after the fact or the event⁸¹ – and resulting from critical reflexion on it, disaster risk reduction needs to be understood more as a critically reflexive process rather than as one that is dependent on technological or sociological quick-fix solutions (Beck, 1995a; 1995b). What is more, they must attend to Latour (2004a) and indeed the local and subaltern voice from the researched village which calls for a perspective on disasters that is built from an association of humans and non-humans and committed to building ethical futures. Thus neither a social engineering, nor a technological engineering of nature provides a full answer to disasters: although both need to be assessed critically: as a political ecology or social vulnerability approach suggests. The answers are rather to be sought through a reflexive search, within oneself and within societies of people, which reflexively interrogates the normative self-society-nature relationship and its contested nature, and treats disaster risk reduction as a non-linear process to be achieved, rather than as a pre-determined social or technocratic strategy.

⁸¹ For example: pollution and its awareness was only made possible after the pollution took effect as a result of modern lifestyles.

Chapter 7

Disasters, Social Change and Politics for Rights

7.1 Introduction

The last chapter has argued that disaster risk reduction be treated as a non-linear complex process committed to building ethical futures. This chapter further seeks to understand how these ethical futures can be built by treating disasters as an opportunity for change and to mobilise social change through the agency of subaltern groups or a politics *for* rights.

This chapter starts by tracing the limits of the local coping strategies to disasters and local constructions of entitlements informed through the moral economy such as notions of *bhav-vyavhar*. Although important, such strategies are not enough to cope with full impacts of the disasters at local levels. Lack of labour work in the agricultural fields after disasters, survival necessities and the need to meet other social obligations such as marriage, push people into undertaking migration to cities or urban areas. The effects of this migration on social relations in their native villages, as well as that of the city they migrate to, and the identity questions faced by the migrants are traced in this chapter.

The Indian constitution upholds the right to caste and gender equality. By tracing the parameters through which social identities are formed and asserted in the context of disaster, this chapter analyses the production of these rights in the social terrain, beyond the limits of governmentality, and through subaltern politics *for* the assertion of these equality rights. In particular, this chapter studies the assertion or non-assertion of these equality rights as an indicator of the dynamics of social change processes given the historical relation of dominance and subordination based on castes and gender in India.

7.2 Disasters, local entitlements and coping

The empirical chapter “In heterogeneous times: disaster response in post colonial India”; discussed the effects of floods and erosion, such as food insecurity, and how the mobilisation of *bhav-vyavhar* (emotional behaviour) in the patron-client relation (unequal reciprocal relations) helped poor people overcome acute food scarcity conditions after the disasters. In this section, I will discuss another normative dimension of *bhav-vyavhar* as local entitlement: namely, a reciprocal exchange which is equal. In this reciprocal

exchange which also has the affective dimension of friendship, similar quantities of the same item borrowed are returned at a later date. That is for example, if petty cash or certain amount of paddy is borrowed then the same is returned back after some time. Typically, the reciprocal exchange of equivalent goods was found amongst the poor people irrespective of their social status in the caste hierarchy. This section will explore the social meanings vested with these reciprocal normative actions and their significance in mobilising a wider social insurance against risks as well as their limits as local coping strategies.

Several women and men in the researched villages narrated that they had depended upon *bhav-vyavhar* to meet immediate contingencies of food or petty cash. As discussed in the empirical chapter on post-colonial India and disaster response, the analysis of MICRODIS survey data has revealed a high dependence on borrowing money – 61.9 percent of all respondents to cope with the effects of flooding and erosion. However, more significantly, almost half of all those who borrowed – namely 48.7 percent – had borrowed at nil percent interest. Respondents made a distinction between *Karja* and *Udhaar*. While *Karja* involves borrowing from a moneylender at the standard local market rate of interest of 10 percent or more, *Udhaar* involves borrowing to be returned without interest. These borrowings made at no interest were done through ‘*bhav-vyavhar*’, and were instrumental in helping tide people over immediate shortages of cash or food after these disasters. Jumna, a woman aged 45 and one of the Muslim respondents, had taken cash from a Hindu resident of their village. As she explained:

“interests are taken by moneylenders. If I have a *bhav-vyavhar* with a person, then they will not take interest from me. They know that I am in a problem and will give me the cash I need. They also know that maybe someday they too will need my help. They say, spend this money, and when you can, return it back. This happens in full honesty by all sides involved” (Jumna, September 2008).

The important aspect of the above-stated equivalent transaction is its obligatory character. Since Marcel Mauss’s work on gifts, there has been much analysis of reciprocal exchanges, with emphasis on the nature of these exchanges in any given society. Mauss says that:

“prestations” are “in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, but are in fact obligatory and interested. The form usually taken is that of the gift generously

offered; but the accompanying behaviour is formal pretence and social deception, while the transaction itself is based on obligation and economic self-interest” (Mauss, 1969 p. 1).

Others have built on this insight of Mauss, and suggested that such reciprocal exchanges involve an emotional connection, and are based on liberty or free-will as well as obligation (Raheja, 1988) (Coleman, 2004). Further, these exchanges build “solidarity” between individuals and members of that society, enabling stability (Mauss, 1969 p. 80).

Levi-Strauss suggests that all reciprocal exchange relationships are marked by a “bundle” of four attitudes, namely mutuality, reciprocity, rights and obligations (Levi-Strauss, 1963 p49). Further, the significance of the exchange does not lie in the value of the commodity that is exchanged, but rather in the social embeddedness of the social actors involved in the exchange (Mosko, 2000). These exchanges also signify personalised relations and can only be understood as a part of the social contexts that generate them. Now, the relations of *bhav-vyavhar* between equals do reflect an inter-personal dimension, and include all the characteristic bundle of attitudes outlined by Levi Strauss. More importantly, as suggested by works of Levi-Strauss, Mauss, and Mosko, these exchanges also contribute to the building of an embedded and extended social structure. Consider, for example, some of the situations in which *bhav-vyavhar* is invoked in the village. When several households faced scarcity immediately after the floods and erosion, their kinship relatives from other villages visited them. These fell into two categories: *rishtedari* (commonly called by villagers as kinship ties from matrilineal sides which included fathers or brothers, cousins of the women); or *pattidari* – (commonly called by villagers as kinship ties from patrilineal side) including distant cousins not staying in their villages). Kinship relatives were found to be visiting them to enquire after their welfare and also to bring agricultural produce; for example, paddy from their own fields. During these visits, the relations of *bhav-vyavhar* enabled the host families to borrow grain and cash to buy and cook food and extend due hospitality towards their visitors. As Suryakala, a woman aged 55 years, from an intermediate caste who had lost most of her lands in erosion, remarked: “For example, if I don’t have enough foodgrains in my house, and I have visitors, guests, or *rishtedar*, then I will borrow and return it when I am able to purchase it from the market” (Suryakala, September 2008)

Thus the *bhav-vyavhar* also enabled families to maintain extended kinship ties and social relations, which were also found to be instrumental in enabling households to cope with

and recover from disasters. Often *pattidari* and *rishtedari* ties gave the much needed wider resources to the disaster-affected households to tide them over times of scarcity and difficulty. These included help to cope with marriage expenses, which had risen due to the destruction of crops by floods and erosion. Whilst home-grown food grains meant less reliance on market-bought grains which reduce the expenditure available for marriages or engagements; the destruction of home grown crops after floods meant that such social ceremonies were now even more expensive than in ordinary times. *Pattidari* as well as *rishtedari* play a crucial role in helping households meet marriage expenses. *Nyota*, a form of giving cash and other gifts by the *pattidari* and *rishtedari* relations during marriage was found prevalent among all castes. Like Mauss's gift, *nyota* gifts are like credits which are returned by the households receiving them – sometimes more than they had received but not less – whenever a marriage takes place in another's house. Further, *pattidari*, *rishtedari* and village ties play an important part in enabling the migration strategies of the disaster-affected people, as the next section will show. Thus the *bhav-vyavhar* of equivalence helps in not only tiding over immediate problems faced after disasters but enables maintenance of wider kinship and village ties and relations. These constitute a crucial safety net for households to meet certain social ceremonies, such as marriage, or to enable migration strategies during difficult times after the disasters.

In such *bhav-vyavhar* of equivalence, an emotional bonding is also considered necessary to sustain such relations: similar to the affective relations found in between the relations of *bhav-vyavhar* between unequal's discussed in post-colonial and disaster response empirical chapter. Such bonding is nurtured through informal visits to each other's houses and mutual help in solving difficulties faced in daily life. Women gave counselling to each other about their problems or exchanged clothes, or simple items like slippers: as when visiting *rishtedari* they did not have proper clothes or footwear. Further, women sharing a *bhav-vyavhar* also intervene in each other's domestic problems. Disasters sometimes lead to situations of acute mental stress and the *bhav-vyavhar* of equivalence helps people deal with them or cope with them in positive ways.

In other words, *bhav-vyavhar* is not done with random individuals but have a recognisable pattern. Such a relation of *bhav-vyavhar* of equivalence is between two individuals, who recognise such relationships of emotional bonding between them and make efforts to nurture and sustain them. This form of *bhav-vyavhar* is similar to what Sahlins's has called balanced reciprocity. While Sahlins (1965a and 1965b) emphasis is on social distance in

such transactions, this section emphasises that, as a social practice, *bhav-vyavhar* of equivalence enables, mobilises and builds wider and extended social solidarities, good will and emotional bonding, and alongside this, crucially from our perspective, also reduces risks and enables recovery from disasters. Yet, notwithstanding the *bhav-vyavhar* as an important coping strategy, several people were also found to have taken a *karja* (loan on interest) to deal with difficult times after floods and erosion.

7.3 Disasters and *Jagaya Kamaya* (to survive and earn)

A large number of people who had taken *karja* from local money lenders were mainly those from scheduled castes or intermediate castes. Some persons of upper castes, namely the *thakurs* and the *brahmans*, who had lost all or most of their lands in the *kataan* and had been impoverished in the process, also resorted to the taking of *karja*. Typically such *karja* was taken for basic consumption purposes such as buying of food, or to meet social expenses such as marriage or health emergencies. Given a high interest rate and low agricultural wages in the area, families revealed that they found it difficult to repay the principal amount or even sometimes the interest on it. Further, after flooding and a shrinkage of agricultural lands due to *kataan*, the consequent failure of crops meant that there was a decrease in or even absence of, proper agricultural work in the villages. Therefore men from households which depended upon wage labour in their village were found to migrate to cities such as Delhi, Lucknow or even as far as Punjab in search of work.

Such migration from the researched villages was called “*Jagaya Kamaya*” which means to *survive and earn* that is managing a bare living. While migration to faraway places such as Punjab meant a long-term stay for six months to a year or more, migration to closer areas such as Delhi or Lucknow were found to be of more intermittent type. Thus people would migrate to the city, stay for a month or two or a little more, return home for a few days and go back to the city, taking into account when they would be needed in the villages during the agricultural cycle. Typically such intermittent migration was undertaken by men, while women stayed at home looking after the children and elderly. Such a pattern of movement is also called as ‘circular migration’ by some theorists (de Haan, 2004).

A reason given by several male and female respondents for women not doing migrant labour was their fear of *badnaami* or shame as well as the cost of living in a city. I also came across cases of women respondents who wanted to migrate with their husbands but

were dissuaded by them or their in-laws or their parents from doing so. Khila, aged 32, a male respondent from an intermediate caste with a marginal land holding, had refused to take his wife along with him to Delhi, following reasons:

“I told her - stay back at home. Do you want to do my *beijjati* [loss of honour]? We stay in a room where all kinds of men come and go. That would lead to my *beijjati*. People over here will say – look at him. He has eloped or ran away to a *pardes* [alien land] with his wife and children. Further, there too, I will have to earn and support them. It is better that they stay here and I send them money for support. What would be gained by taking them with me? There I will have to take a separate room, my expenses will increase. If alone, I can share the room with 2-3 more people, share the rent. I will be able to save some money. If I take them with me, where and how will I keep them? I may not earn enough to even feed them” (Khila, November 2008).

Further, several respondents also stated that the migration of women was a sign of an extremely adverse economic situation, or of poverty, in the household and had a stigma and shame attached to it: As Khila continued:

“People say all sorts of things – that they are people of lower standings. They will say there is nothing in their house. The *rishtedar* [wife’s relatives] will say that we have become *bhikari* [beggars] and so we are now taking women with us to *pardes*. So we prefer that they stay here and survive somehow”.

Taking women and children on migrant labour work is associated in the village with an inability of the household to mobilise or keep some consumption grains for the family members stayed behind.

Since several of the migrants from the villages stayed and worked in one location in the city, a standard practice in the case of cities such as Delhi was to send money for their family with a returning member from their village or one nearby. Inability to maintain a family when a male member is migrating was considered an indicator of the households’ extreme poverty leading to the loss of social standing. Such depictions of shame attached with the migration of women was found across all the castes – upper, intermediate as well as the scheduled castes.

While women migration was generally looked down upon in circular migration, a long term migration plan for two or more years could include the woman and the children. Thus two of my women respondents who were sisters-in-law belonging to an intermediate caste household had earlier migrated to Jalandhar, Punjab and stayed for a period of 3-4 years before returning to their village with their husbands. Similarly another woman belonging to

the brahman caste had migrated to Lucknow with her husband a couple of years earlier. All these migrating households had been made landless with the erosion of their lands by the Ghagra. While their husbands had been daily labourers in these cities, they worked as housemaids.

Additionally, some of the poorer upper-caste thakur households in the villages feared another kind of *badnami*, or loss of standing and honour, amongst people of their own caste if men undertook migration for casual labour work in the cities. They feared that it would affect the marriage prospects of their children or their ability to ‘sit’ with their fellow caste members. Thakurs follow hypergamy (a practice where girls are married into a sub-caste, with higher social than natal status, within their caste group) and thus, any loss of social standing can create problems for a son’s marriage in particular, as the bride’s family would look for an alliance with a family of higher social and economic standing. Typically, this fear was found amongst upper-caste households which earlier had possessed lands, but now had lost all or most of them in *Kataan*. Left with no other livelihood option, some of these households had resorted to undertaking casual labour through migration to cities such as Delhi or Lucknow, while a few others preferred to live in extremely poor conditions in their village rather than face a loss of caste honour by doing non-traditional physical work.

Typically, in such impoverished thakur households, where men did not migrate out, it was the women who more or less ran the household. For this purpose they would maintain a couple of buffaloes for the sale of milk, or take a low-paid white-collar jobs on a Government programme: such as working in an *anganwadi* (crèche). Rita thakur, aged 32 and an *anganwadi* helper in the village, justifies her husband’s decision not to go for work when she asks “how can we work like *Suds*?”: thus, suggesting that doing physical labour like other castes in the village would be equivalent to them becoming *Suds* or “lower” castes in a metaphorical sense. More importantly, doing such casual labour meant a *loss of symbolic capital*⁸²: that is of social prestige and status, through which caste supremacy was asserted by them in the village. Thakurs claim their caste supremacy as members of a traditional warrior community or as ruling kings. Most of the erstwhile rajahs of the areas

⁸² Following Bourdieu, I use the notion of symbolic capital to show how symbolic interests such as honour and shame are closely linked with ‘value’ that a family has in the village society. See Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

were thakurs. Someshsingh thakur, a male aged 30 years, explained to me that thakurs do not like to work in low or subordinate positions and so do not like casual labour work:

“some would think that doing such casual labour is an *apmaan* [humiliation] of their caste pride. Thakurs have a pride and for that reason Ranapratap [one of the historical warrior heroes amongst rajputs] lived in jungle and ate roti but did not accept *gulaamgiri* [status of a servant or of a very low subordinate] of anyone. They do not like to accept *gulaamgiri* even if they are very poor” (Someshsingh, December 2008).

Another woman respondent, Purvi a thakur aged 38, recalled that her husband had gone in search of work to Punjab which had created a big furore in her *maika* (natal family). Being ashamed to admit the reasons for his journey, when her husband came back, she told everyone that he had only gone for *tehelne* (sightseeing). Another of my respondents Rajani, a thakur and aged 60 was not very keen on her elder son going for *mazdoori* or labour work, although her household needed the money to support the college education of his son in the city; she asked me:

“When we do not have enough how we can support further studies and education? We have many problems. *Suds* get everything from the government, we don’t. *Chutkava* [lower class persons] can go for work outside but where can brahman-thakur go? We just manage with what we have.”

Her daughter in law Ujawala, aged 36 quipped to that: “...but how can we manage without going out for labour? *Pet maani*? [Can you contain hunger?]. Anyway, what will we do with a lot of *Ijjat* [respect]? Faced with problems, we have to do it”. Another one of my thakur respondents complained “how can we sit in our *samaaj* [community] if we have nothing? ... Yet there is a shame attached to doing casual labour in the city”.

Some of the thakurs, who had been impoverished to a point where they did have to face issues of acute hunger everyday, were more distressed by the fact that their situation of poverty had become known to their kin and neighbours. The house belonging to Chetansingh, (a thakur) had collapsed during the floods, as a result of the which the family had to move in with their kin in the village (while maintaining a separate cooking space in that house). Evidently upset, he stated:

“Since my house has collapsed I have to stay with my kin. That is a problem. What can be a bigger problem than this? When we didn’t have enough food, we could stay quietly in our own house. Nobody saw you. But when we are staying with others, then they see us. They see that there is nothing for us to eat”.(Chetansingh, male, aged, 34, November 2008)

These voices show how discourses around gender, caste and class identities were again enmeshed together in complex ways in the choice of resorting to migration labour as a coping and recovery strategy after disasters. Further, discourses of masculinity and femininity were also enacted through ‘caste’ and notions of ‘honour’, similar to those recorded in the postcolonial and disaster responses empirical chapter in relation to public employment works schemes such as NREGA. In particular these notions inform codes of conduct and behaviour, and in that sense are a part of the moral economy of the village. However what is also clear is that notions around caste identity and honour are changing: as some of the above voices show the tensions around the choices shown by the fact that thakurs *are* now migrating to Delhi. These changes are in turn also changing the power relations within the villages as the next subsection will show.

The thakur men who migrated out to Delhi by and large undertook similar physical labour work like those from intermediate or scheduled castes. Most of the people who migrated to Delhi went to work in a particular location – namely the stone market in Jeevakpur⁸³ in Delhi – where loaded and unloaded heavy stone slabs inside the shops or delivered these slabs to the purchaser’s house, either on a cycle rickshaw or a vehicle hired by the purchasers. Either way, all migrating men called the work ‘dangerous’ as it involved the carrying of heavy material, which if dropped could cause serious injury. Some of the thakur men did try to get jobs as security guards in Delhi, which seemed for them more in line with their traditional work worthy of a ‘warrior caste’ rather than doing the casual labour work. However, none of my respondents were successful in getting such a job and had to settle for the casual labour work in Delhi.

This migration for casual work of traditionally dominant upper castes along with the traditionally marginalised and socially excluded castes such as scheduled castes in the researched villages is a recent phenomenon which started mainly after the *kataan* of the lands of upper-castes people. Most of my thakur respondents migrating to Delhi had only started to migrate for the last two to three years. However, this migration, as well as a general impoverishment of the thakurs and brahmans the traditional dominant castes is affecting and changing the social relations in the villages. In the next section I will map out these processes and how they affect the social change dynamics and rights in the villages.

⁸³ The name of the exact location in Delhi where people from my researched village migrate has been changed.

7.4 Disasters, migration, social change and rights

As noted in the theoretical framework chapter, disasters have been treated as opportunities for change by complexity theorists such as Rosenthal. They have long also been treated as effectors of social change dynamics in society (Prince, 1920). Bates et al argued that disasters put stress on social systems and force it to adapt, making some of these changes permanent and leading to “new forms of contact, cooperation and conflict between existing groups and organizations” (Bates & Peacock, 1987 p312). In the context of Hurricane Andrew in Miami, USA in 1992, Morrow and Peacock observe a change in social networks and processes: some positive such as emergence of new community groups and some negative such as increased racial segregation. They suggest:

“the relationship between disasters and social change is an intriguing, albeit complex, one. There can be no denying that a natural disaster, particularly one of the magnitude of Hurricane Andrew, alters in dramatic fashion the biophysical environment ... Adaptation and change were required and inevitable” (Morrow & Peacock, 1997 p. 226).

The migration of the flood and erosion-affected communities in the researched villages could be seen as one such as adaptive strategy. Yet such a strategy can also set in motion other social changes such as contestations around social identity and assertions of equality rights: as the following narratives will show.

One of the migrants from the thakur caste was Virsingh who started to go to Jeevakpur, in Delhi for casual labour work. Aged 40, he came from a landed family and said that they had earlier lived a life of *sukun* (happy and prosperous) but now he had lost most of his land due to erosion. He explained to me in a matter of fact way why he went to Delhi for labour work. Virsingh stated:

“I started going to Delhi in the last two-three years. Seeing that I did not have enough money to support my family, I was forced to run away for work somewhere. So I went to Delhi. In Delhi those with money live in comfort. And all that the *labour party*, lower class people earn; spend a large part of it on the cost of living there. At the most I have been able to save about 1000-1200 rupees [20-25\$] per month to send back home.” (Virsingh October 2008).

While Virsingh identified himself with the labouring classes of the city, which also included those from his village who belonged to either the intermediate castes or the scheduled castes, the same understanding about Virsingh was not shared by those migrating and belonging to either the intermediate or scheduled castes. Laxman, a male,

aged 36, from a former untouchable caste, contests Virsingh's claim that he has come to Delhi in search of casual labour for survival. Instead he argues:

“Even those who have money are aware that their money will dry up one day. So they go out, work and ensure that it sustains. All the thakurs who work in Delhi like us have money ... Their lands and money from it may have dried up, but that does not mean that they don't have money. They will come back to the village and give the earned money in the form of *karja* [credit on interest] and make interest out of it. Now that his [Virsingh's] lands are eroded he makes “profit” from elsewhere; has to do hard labour work” (Laxman, December 2008).

My respondents from both the scheduled caste and from intermediate castes insisted that the migrating thakurs had enough money of their own and in the case of some households they insisted that the thakurs were only going to play *jua* (playing cards with money) or drink *daru* (liquor) in the city: that is in pursuit of pleasure and not for basic needs like themselves. In other words, although migrating to Delhi and doing similar physical hard work, the narratives of those from scheduled castes and intermediate castes dis-identified themselves from the migrating thakurs and insisted that the purpose of their migrating was in some ways unwholesome. Such negative attributions to the behaviour of the members of the upper castes who were migrating to Delhi is in tune with the general critique of the immoral behaviour of the upper castes by members of the intermediate and scheduled castes: as discussed in the earlier empirical chapter on Disasters, social natures and the subaltern.

Alongside such a critique of upper-caste behaviour were also assertions by the scheduled castes and intermediate castes questioning the caste-based supremacy asserted by the upper castes, which referred them as those belonging to an inferior caste by terming all of them as “*suds*”. For example, Manasram a male, aged 28 years with marginal land holdings after erosion and of an intermediate *gudiya* caste, asserted “They (thakur) work like any of us in Delhi. If they are “superior” to us, why do they do work similar to us”? In other words, as noted in the earlier section, the worry and anxiety of the thakurs that in doing casual labour like other castes, they would lose caste honour and thus their symbolic capital such as prestige and status in the society seemed to be taking effect in the light of the assertion by Manasram. Such assertions of Manasram perceiving a loss of symbolic capital of the dominant thakurs also needs to be assessed alongside other developments in the village over the years, which led to a perceived increase in the dignity and therefore the

symbolic capital of both scheduled castes and intermediate castes: thus setting a stage for such assertions within a broader context.

Education amongst the scheduled castes has been one such prime mover of the changed context. For example, Bhawani, a male aged 30, whose family's traditional work was cleaning the carcass of a dead animal in the village (the work of a *chamar* caste) and had studied up to intermediate levels in school. He asserted "I am not afraid of these *thakurs* and so they don't say anything to me, but will continue to ill-treat those who are afraid of them. They don't say anything to me if I pass through their fields but will make bad remarks to others". Thus education in itself gave Bhawani a sense of self esteem and pride which in turn had changed his relation with the upper castes. Secondly the ascendancy of Mayawati, the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, a woman belonging to a former untouchable caste has also contributed to the sense of dignity of the scheduled castes in the village. Bhawani's brother Puram, aged 35 who is active in local village party politics and a staunch supporter of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) of Mayawati asserted:

"the fear of the reprisal from the upper castes lessened as Government became stronger ... They [upper caste] say it is the Government of Mayawati who has given *badhava* [importance] to us. But she has not given us any importance. All that she has done is to change the pages of history by saying that we [former untouchables] too have rights. And since then we have been asserting our rights and we are heard in the Government" (Puram, December 2008).

Indeed one of the common sayings of the upper as well as intermediate castes throughout my stay in the villages was that "Now it is their [scheduled caste] Government in power", which showed the symbolic capital associated with being of the caste similar to that of the chief minister meaning a ruler, in this case, a person from a former untouchable caste.

Lastly, apart from the loss of symbolic capital of the *thakurs*, migration of the scheduled and intermediate castes to cities has also fractured their earlier dependency for survival on labour work from the landed dominant castes in the village. As Medha, aged 60 and belonging to a traditional *chamar* or a scheduled caste reminisced "My old man worked for the *thakurs* for 27 years for a pittance. Now my children refuse to do so. Now that my sons are older they migrate out for work and have now started to earn some money. Only after that we have been able to eat and live well" (Medha, November 2008). In other words the loss of symbolic capital of the dominant castes has not only been accompanied by an increased sense of dignity, and thereby an increase of symbolic capital, on the part of

scheduled caste but also by the changed material conditions of socio-economic dependency on the traditional upper castes.

Alongside this changed socio-economic dependency and perceived symbolic capital associated with different castes are changes in the behaviour of those belonging to the scheduled castes, which show a transgression of certain codes of behaviour associated with caste supremacy. For example, some of my scheduled caste respondents stated that unlike previously, now, whenever thakurs passed by or spoke to them, they would remain seated on their cots: something unthinkable about 20 years ago. All my scheduled caste respondents had a story to tell which included some act of violence – beating their fathers or them when children – for violating such codes such as always standing in front of the thakurs. Such situations of blatant open violence and discrimination have changed as of now in these villages. Other common code transgressions included the wearing of smart clothes or possessing consumer items such as mobile phones – symbolic of wealth and well-being. Other minor ones included moving about on motorcycles by those who had moved up the socio-economic ladder mainly due to a government job. Such symbolic transgressions have also been observed by Osella et al in the context of scheduled caste persons who have new wealth to their villages in Kerala after migrating to Gulf countries (Osella & Osella, 2004). Given this, I suggest that although constitutionally, untouchability and caste-based discrimination in public spheres are abolished, the assertion and realisation of these equality rights can only be assessed through the changes in the historical relations of dominance and subordination between traditionally excluded or marginalised castes and dominant ones. The above narratives tell us a story of the researched villages undergoing transitions or experiencing social changes on these counts. On the one hand, to some extent the patron-client relations and general dominance of the wealthy upper caste and classes continued as shown and discussed in the empirical chapter “In heterogenous times: disaster response in post-colonial India”. On the other hand, the above narratives also tell us a story of social change or of villages in transition, which at least partly, if not wholly, can be attributed to the erosion and floods. Thus as a result of the disaster, there was a decrease of the symbolic capital of the dominant upper castes of the village accompanied by a decrease in the material dependency of the scheduled and intermediate castes on the upper castes.

Gupta (2000) points to the different strategies used by marginalised caste groups to discredit the ideology of caste-based supremacy. Gupta distinguishes between two forms of stratification: an open system based for example on wealth where vertical mobility is

possible; and a closed system, in which are notions of race, caste and sex ascribed to different social groups constitute a system of differentiation based on a hierarchical value. Gupta argues that protests against a closed system of stratification such as caste emphasize differences, because such systems produce hierarchy as a result of power and the suppression of voices, rather than as a result of ideological consent (Gupta, 2000). For example, Gupta shows that one of the strategies used by the so-called 'low castes' is to question the inferiority imposed on them by the upper castes and to claim a superiority of their own castes. In particular Gupta's research found that some of the 'low castes' argued that the origin of their caste was not 'inferior' and as such contested and discredited the claims of upper-castes supremacy who similarly mobilised on the basis of caste origin.

In my researched villages, while certain intermediate castes such as gudiyas asserted an overt caste pride and superiority by claiming that they had served Rama, the mythical Hindu god⁸⁴, for the scheduled castes and most of the other intermediate castes, the contestation of caste supremacy took the form of discrediting the moral uprightness of the upper castes. Here, in the researched villages the discourse around labour (that upper caste too are doing the same kind of labour) or are using the labour wages in immoral ways (liquor, *jua*, *karja*) was used by the scheduled and intermediate castes to discredit the caste based supremacy asserted by those of higher castes. This contestation of the supremacy of a caste-based identity is important as the upper castes have used this ideology of supremacy to subjugate and perpetuate their domination in all other fields of life: social, economic and political (Dumont, 1998; Sharma, 1999; Gupta, 2000). The contestation of caste-based supremacy is therefore an important indicator of the social change dynamics in rural India which at least can partly be attributed to the disaster and its effects. In the last chapter we saw the discourse about dominant castes being taught a lesson by the River Ghagra: that is through *kataan due to their immoral ways of amassing wealth*. Such discourses also add to the general discourse used by the scheduled castes and intermediate castes to question the caste-based supremacy asserted by the dominant castes.

Alongside these contestations, however, continue other ideas associated with caste based supremacy: namely, ideas of the purity and pollution of different castes and apportioned

⁸⁴ The gudiyas claimed that when Rama, the mythical Hindu god was sent to exile by his evil stepmother, he had to cross the river. At that time, the gudiyas had taken him from one shore to another and had washed his feet (*guds*) earning them the name gudiyas. As a result they maintain that gudiya's right over the river crossing is still recognised and are not expected to pay any tarai (or levy) whenever they cross the River Ghagra by boat in the area.

practices of eating and drinking water amongst castes in the researched villages. All caste groups practiced eating and drinking water from households of different castes according to the degree to which they considered the caste to be either pure or polluted. The upper castes such as brahmans and thakurs claimed that all caste groups ate cooked food and drank water in their houses, claiming a purer caste status. Some intermediate castes such as gudiyas and luniyas also claimed that all castes ate *pucca* food (fried food) and drank water in their houses. Only the scheduled castes were the outcasts in the practices of food sharing, in the sense that no person from another caste would accept water or cooked food from them, although raw paddy or agricultural produce or resources could be exchanged. Similarly, no Hindu, (including outcast scheduled castes) or Muslim household ate cooked food or drank water from each-other's house; here also, raw paddy and agricultural produce could be exchanged. Simultaneously, cooked food and water were given by the upper and intermediate castes to the scheduled castes, in different contexts (for example social ceremonies), in separate cups and plates. The village well was, however, used commonly by all including the scheduled castes, with each household bringing their own vessel to draw out water. Sociological literature on caste argues that upper-caste practices around eating and drinking are linked with their claims of higher-caste status, power and prestige Dumont, (1998), Gupta (2000), Sharma (1999). However this does not mean that scheduled or intermediate castes accepted upper-caste claims of their being inferior (Deliege, 1992), Gupta (2000) on account of these practices. Nevertheless eating and drinking practices with their discriminatory values and their links with ritual purity are ways in which upper castes try to maintain their symbolic hierarchy within the caste society.

In the researched villages, as noted earlier, the migrants to cities included scheduled castes, intermediate castes and also now the upper caste thakurs and brahmans. In particular, migration to Delhi in Jeevakpur included respondents from all the above castes. However, visits to this location showed that their staying conditions were congested: with 5-10 men staying together in a small single room, and that practices of eating and drinking water across the castes – as practiced in their village – could not be maintained. The food was cooked communally way and water was drunk from the shared pots where it was stored. In the words of a migrant, Laxman, a former untouchable who in Delhi stayed with both intermediate caste groups and the upper caste thakurs in one room:

“How can we have discrimination over there? We have to stay in the same room ... When the food is cooked together, served together; or from my hand they take food or water or when they serve water to me and I drink the same, where is the discrimination? Then there is no discrimination” (Laxman, December 2008).

Yet after the return to their village, the same practices of discriminatory eating and drinking practices continued amongst the migrants of different caste groups with some exceptions with those with whom they have developed the relations of *bhav-vyavhar*. Laxman says “If I have relation of *bhav-vyavhar* with them, then we may behave differently when in Bahraich [for example sharing of cooked food] or elsewhere away from the village. But here in the village, we will have to maintain the facade” (Laxman, December 2008). This same facade was maintained with me, when I asked anyone publicly about their eating and drinking practices in Delhi or in their villages. The public discourse was always that caste purity was preserved, even when they migrated to Delhi, by maintaining social distance implied in eating and drinking practices with certain castes: such as the former untouchables. Laxman’s narrative in private and my own visit to their places of stay and work in Delhi suggested otherwise. Laxman shared with me why such public discourse was necessary “People are afraid that others in the village will say – look they stay and eat together. People are afraid of others (their caste members) in the village”. Thus the associated fear of caste repercussions and recriminations led to a shared public silence on the way they had to change their eating and drinking practices whilst living in the city. Amidst such public silences is also, however, some degree of mockery of the upper caste duplicity about behaviour patterns in relation to eating and drinking: for example, when it is asserted by the former untouchables that upper-caste men stealthily drink liquor from a shared glass: thus making all such transgressions of caste codes acceptable as long as they are beyond the public eye. Such mockery about upper-caste behaviour needs to be understood against the earlier discussion on the contestation by other castes of the claimed superiority of upper-castes. In another instance, Rukma, a woman, aged 50, a former untouchable sarcastically noted “during panchayat elections the *thakur* who contested them came to me asking for my vote. Then he touched my feet. Then he had no shame – he was a *thakur* and yet he bowed in front of me – a *chamar*” (Rukma, October 2008). Further, such assertions also show the power of ‘vote bank’ politics in India, whereby the voices of traditionally excluded groups and their votes do count as a result of the universal enfranchisement in India.

7.5 Migrants: city, identity and rights

All my respondents have initially migrated to the cities through village and kinship networks. One of the first persons to initiate the migration to Jeevakpur, Delhi from Ghagrapur had now over a span of 15 years become a local labour contractor for the shopkeepers in Delhi: leading one of the labour “gangs” (as they are called). Now many have followed him to the city. As Rajesh, a male aged 30 years, and belonging to an intermediate caste noted:

“we do not go to *anjaan* [unknown] city. For example, if I go to Mumbai and do not know anyone then I will starve of hunger. Or else I will have to take money from home. I will get work only if I know somebody, and not otherwise. And why will anybody give me work if they don’t know me; who am I; where am I from and why I have come?” (Rajesh November 2010).

Thus my respondents had gone for the first time to the city along with a village or a kinship contact person. This role of kinship and fellow villagers by the first time migrants, have been noted by other studies such as by de Haan (2004).

All migrants across the castes confessed that life in Jeevakpur, Delhi, was harsh and full of hardship. Jeevakpur is a low-income settlement with rooms and houses primarily owned by a “*jamadaar*”: (a sweeper community; a scheduled caste) who worked as municipal workers in the city, and were themselves a marginalised group in the city. The migrants said that their room owners, the *jamadaars* were notorious in the area for liquor drinking and the playing of *Jua* (or betting on cards), or picking a fight. Due to this bad reputation, police or other communities did not enter in their location. The migrants showed an anger against the elite Delhites – the shop owners and the customers for whom they worked – who, they complained, were indifferent to their plight and were constantly trying to undercut their wages. The main problems of living in the city were: access to water, labour wages, sanitation, vulnerability to accidents at work, and having to sleep on a pavement as the rented room was too small to accommodate all persons staying there. Living was hard as earnings had to be made every-day. One of the young male migrants Mohit, aged 22 from an intermediate caste shared with me the reasons why he preferred his village to this work in Delhi:

“In village, whether you work or not you get *roti* [bread] in the evening in your house. Here if you don’t work, you won’t have money. In a city, no person is your own or a stranger ... There without money you can’t do anything. If you have money, you are ok. If not, you are nobody. That is why I prefer my village” (Mohit, December 2008).

The migrants complained that the language used by the city dwellers were ‘*kadvi*’ (harsh) with no feeling of love for them; their attitude indifferent to their needs. When I first met Dildar, a male from intermediate caste, aged 32, it was in his village Ghagrapur, when he had just returned from Delhi. Then, he was angrily narrating to me his experience in Delhi about how the employers were not even sensitive to the labourer’s needs of water. Many of them worked as coolies or casual labourers, and at times, were employed for a whole day’s work without the basic facility of drinking water. If they had money, they could buy water, but if not, they had to just go without. They were angry about the buildings in Delhi where the housing colonies would hire *chowkidar* (security guards) with instructions not to allow them to enter the compound of the buildings to drink water, even when there were water taps available. Such behaviour was called *asabhya* (uncivilised). Later I met Dildar again in Delhi where he showed me his tiny room in Jeevakpur which he shared with others from his village. The indifference of the Delhities to the migrants basic human needs and their sole commoditized relation with those in Delhi was difficult for them to digest as they said that even a stranger is cared for and greeted in their village: such as myself who had lived and visited their village as a researcher. They reminded me that nobody had insisted on my ‘proof’ of identity before sharing information with me, but in Delhi, they said, without proof of an identity, they had no rights. Treated as nameless and faceless persons by elite Delhites whose only interest in them was economic: that of extraction of their labour, they said that they had no relation with the city, except the necessary one of labour. In Delhi, all they cared for was earning enough to send money home.

Jeevakpur and the lane in which they stayed called as “*saat number galli*” (seven number lane) was their world. As Akash, a male aged 30 years from the thakur caste, told me in Delhi:

“We have not seen or known any other part of the city. I go for labour work, and if there is none, then I sit with others in this 7 number galli. What do I have to do with rest of the others in the city? If I don’t have *roti* [bread], these dilliwalla will not give me one. It is him [pointing to a fellow labourer who incidentally belonged to the gudiya caste from his village and was sitting along with him in the 7 number galli awaiting message for work on the mobile phones of their labour contractor] who will feed me. No Dilliwalla will give us anything ... Here, we have no *lena-dena* [interactive relation] with anyone. We only have a *lena-dena* with each other [other migrants from their village]” (Akash, December 2008).

The city's indifference to these migrant workers made them highly dependent on each other for their daily survival and communal living. The daily survival is hard in the city due to casualness of work and therefore a living with uncertainty of not getting work and wages. This wage uncertainty and risks of falling ill and incurring expenses; meant borrowing of money from fellow migrant villagers or their kinship relations in the city. Thus the relation of '*bhav-vyavhar*' was now lived in the city and seemed to be their final refuge for coping with any adversity.

Living as they were in the city through circular migration, they felt their needs and their rights would never be heard by the city's government. Akash asked me "when I don't get my rights in my village, how can I expect to get them here in another city? I need a ration card, an identity proof. When I don't have one, to whom can I go?"

The predicament of the migrants from my researched villages, who had come to Delhi in search of *jagaya kamaya*, was that of exclusion from the city's civic, social and political life. They were entitled only to a 'bare living' a 'bare life' without any other rights. Although metro cities such as Delhi and Mumbai are celebrated for their cosmopolitanism, the experience of these migrants shows that far from being a cosmopolitan city, Delhi excluded from its civic community certain classes of people, one of which was the migrant labouring class, which was devoid of any real and substantive citizenship rights. The community of these migrants lived as unequal citizens and felt acutely their distance from the elite Delhi city-dwellers. Living in Jeevakpur, the migrant's identity was demarked by their communal address the '*saat number galli*', where they began and ended their day, while toiling through the day as nameless labourers. Little wonder, then, that their dreams and aspirations of good living were tied to the life of the villages, which all of them sought, irrespective of castes. It seemed as though village politics with all its complexities was preferred to the city's indifference by these migrants. However, the fact of circular migration suggests that the good living aspired to in the village could only be enabled through migrant labour work in the city: thus the enmeshment of city and a village life was an inevitable fact for several flood and erosion-affected families in the researched villages. The social change dynamics in village power relations through a contested caste matrix, as discussed in the earlier section, were now accompanied by a new set of them: that is, one in which the identity of "migrants" (irrespective of their castes) and the "city's elite" whom they served existed within a social field of mutually antagonistic social relation. As a voiceless community in a city, the migrants are currently rightless but it may not be too

much to say that the right to define and live a “good life” as opposed to a “bare life” in a city is but one imminent struggle in the making of future India.

7.6 Chapter concluding remarks

This chapter has traced the production of rights in spheres beyond governmentality. It has analysed the normative rights inscribed in *bhav-vyavhar* of equivalence and ideas of morality which affect coping and adaptation strategies following flooding and erosion. It has also discussed how flooding and erosion has led to the loss of land holdings by the uppercastes - otherwise used to maintain their traditional dominance in the village.

The chapter shows migration as an adaptive strategy is now used by all caste groups to cope with the impoverishing effects of floods and erosion. A change in the social dynamics in the village can now be seen as old relations of dependency have been broken accompanied by changes in the symbolic capital of different castes. As a result, the assertion of equality rights or of a politics *for* rights can be gauged through the ways in which upper-caste supremacy is contested by the former untouchable and other intermediate caste groups: an indicator of social change dynamics. This constitutes a confirmation of the findings of other disaster studies (Bates and Peacock, 1987; Morrow and Peacock, 1997) which suggest that disasters *can* unleash social change in societies. Alongside this development are the experiences of the migrants in the cities such as Delhi, where they suffer indignity and a life of peripheral living, excluded from the city’s civic, social and political life. The attitude of the city’s elite and the Governmental apparatus promote a particular discourse of citizenship rights, which is apathetic to the lives and the rights of the migrants. Such as discourse produces the *homo sacer*, a migrant person who is without identity and rights in a city, and is thus both included in the labour work and excluded from the civic life. The chapter concludes that the production of the rightless *homo sacer* only sets the stage for forms of future assertions and contestations by these migrants in the new struggle for their right to define and live a ‘good life’ in the city to which they contribute their sweat, toil and labour. Such struggle *for* rights is imminent in the building of the ethical futures in India.

Chapter 8

Conclusions and Recommendations

Having reflected on my empirical data, theoretical perspectives and methodological strategies in earlier chapters, I will use this chapter to outline not only my recommendations for disaster theory and practice but also to reflect on my research journey. I do this by revisiting the broad contours of the choices made by me at important moments in my entire research journey, placing my research within the broader theoretical and methodological debates to show how it aligns with or challenges them. I also extract the main narrative and conclusion of the thesis, leading to concrete suggestions and recommendations, contributing to new knowledge in disaster theory and practice.

8.1 Reflecting on the overall research process and placing the thesis within the broad theoretical and methodological debates

The broad choice of my research topic question – namely investigating rights and disasters – was a result of my earlier work with a number of organisations that I have mentioned in the introductory chapter of this thesis. My earlier critical work with communities as well as an initial literature review had suggested that there was a gap between different conceptions of rights; namely the state, civil society actors and the communities. What was unknown and unclear to me then, were the substance and the expression of the gap, its effects in general and in a disaster context. These stimulated my initial research questions concerning the need to investigate the state as well as local conceptions of rights and their interactions in a disaster affected empirical context, specifically the MICRODIS field site Bahraich. Beyond these research questions, I took a largely inductive approach to my inquiry, which relied predominantly on ethnographic research methods as discussed in my methodology chapter.

The fieldwork was hectic, messy, challenging and the bigger picture was not always very clear to me during that time. I had hoped that being close to my field area, collecting stories as told to me by my respondents over the five month period of my field work and closely participating in and observing the social lives of my respondents (both in the researched village and later briefly in their city of migration Delhi through participant observation), would help me develop that bigger picture. The intensive time spent in the

field as well as transcribing and coding work back in the UK helped me immerse myself and reflect on my empirical data, leading to the writing of my empirical chapters and the theoretical framework which formed the different building blocks of the bigger picture.

In terms of methodology, the overall research process followed by this thesis has shown how abstract sociological and political concepts such as rights can be understood and grasped hermeneutically through localised precepts and practices which in turn necessitate a *close and critical enquiry* in the field. This was by far the most challenging, complex but also interesting part of the research process which required a constant weaving of a micro with a macro narrative; that is, the grounded and the abstract versions of rights. Whilst this mediating process had started during my fieldwork, it had to be carried on all through the writing of this thesis.

An important dimension of this mediation was how to engage with the different voices emerging from the field. Here, I have paid close attention to the different perspectives along the lines of gender, class and caste but ultimately wrote the thesis through the standpoint of the subaltern groups. In my research, which had an emancipatory interest, all my empirical chapters have therefore privileged interpretations of rights by the subaltern groups over others: the subaltern marking the contextual active voice of the socially marginalised groups and communities in a given field of social relations.

My methodological choices resonate as well as differ from other methodologies, namely the participatory research methods which seek to develop local perspectives and knowledge on a particular issue. The participatory methodologies as pioneered by Robert Chambers also ask an important question; namely ‘whose reality counts’ (Chambers, 1997) in their attempt to privilege local over expert knowledge. My research too engaged with the question of developing local perspectives and in that sense had a close affiliation with the objectives of participatory methods. Yet, my own research process has shown that there are several realities, several voices within communities and privileging any of them has research consequences. The answer to the question that Chambers ask, namely, ‘whose reality counts’ is by no means a straightforward one. In my research, my attempt to privilege subaltern perspectives has led me to a particular trail, enquiry and conclusions. Thus, my research also differs significantly from the participatory methods, which, while emphasising the local may either shy away from making such choices or may suppress differences in an attempt to find ‘the’ local voice. On the issue of use of participatory

methods, Mosse too argues that they can assume, encourage and express consensus findings, whilst suppressing differences (Mosse, 1995). More importantly, my research also suggests that developing particularity of voices and perspectives takes time and painstaking fieldwork rather than one-off use of participatory tools that often emphasise visual methods of enquiry. Understanding what lies behind the stories told by the excluded social groups also needs a nuanced and sensitive understanding of the social relations at stake. Uncovering reality is an incredibly complex process particularly if the reality of the excluded social groups is to be counted. It demands not only a 'close' but also a 'critical' enquiry in the field.

The hermeneutic emphasis has also meant that the theoretical discussions in my empirical chapters are also led by the empirical insights. Thus my choice of social theories for discussion in my various empirical chapters has been led by my empirical evidence. Similarly my theoretical conclusions in the empirical chapters have been led by my empirical data, especially notions of subalternity and its significance. As I uncovered the significance of my empirical voices, I found them at different times agreeing and at variance with the theoretical perspectives proposed by influential Indian scholars working on those themes.

For these reasons, I found the theoretical formulations of Indian scholars such as Ramchandra Guha (Guha, 1989; 1991; Guha & Martinez-Alier, 1997), whose seminal work has inspired many including myself, inadequate for the purpose of my empirical enquiry in the chapter 'Disasters, social nature and the subaltern'. Guha's critique of deep ecology is well known as he questions the unequal burden of conservation put by this perspective on the peasantry and indigenous people most affected by ecological degradation. He rightly questions the notions of 'wilderness' and argues for a third world environmentalism that is based on models of environmental and social justice that takes into account people's livelihoods. Guha also contends that the anthropocentric/biocentric distinction is of no real consequence to the ecological regeneration strategies committed to social justice and that attention to the eastern man's [sic] affinity to nature reinforces orientalist ways of looking at India in exotic terms (Guha 1989; Said 2001). I argue that by suggesting so, Guha has privileged social justice over people's perceived relations with nature and has therefore missed out on the critical ways in which people engage with modernity and technocracy. These perspectives form the subalternity when viewed against

a modern and technocratic approach to environment and disasters, and introduce a field of ethical discourse in their own right.

My own field work had suggested that villagers approached the situation created by floods and erosion by the River Ghagra through a complex ethical grid wherein they did perceive a relation with nature, in this case the River Ghagra, as material to their situation. Ghagra was given an agency, wherein her actions through flooding and erosion were seen as a result of her own autonomous will which was considered unknowable. At the same time, social relations and government technical interventions were invoked as a reason for the flooding and erosion. People's adaptive strategies to flood and erosion were considered a result of Ghagra's will, governmental actions or inactions and the moral frames of social relations. Thus neither fully anthropocentric nor fully ecocentric reasons were given an ontological primacy in the causal reasons attributed to the floods and erosion. Disasters, specifically floods and erosion, were considered a result of the production of social nature: that is, people perceived non-separation of nature from the social and vice versa. Whilst this view can be considered a 'generalised' subaltern view in its own right, the added critique of the socially excluded groups on the production of social nature embedded within unjust and exploitative social relations in their area, and the role of the River Ghagra in redistributing wealth, need to be considered as a 'particular' subaltern critique. In my view, both the 'generalised' as well as 'particular' subaltern critiques espouse complex ethical ways of relating with nature and the social, and are far from the 'exotic' representations that Guha derides. Just because people do not subscribe to our understanding of 'modern' or a 'rational' viewpoint they need not be dismissed as exotic; rather they beg the question of how might a researcher, as in my case, whose own value system may not subscribe to such beliefs in relation to the river relate with them? Instead of dismissing them as of no consequence, I found once again, the application of the notion of subalternity to such beliefs as an important way to engage with these perspectives, as a way to open up the muted enquiry implicit in these representations. It is a discourse which questions the hegemonic technocratic rationality by neither agreeing nor disagreeing with it fully. Given these empirical as well as methodological considerations, I found Guha's dismissal of the need to understand people's relations with nature beyond their livelihood concerns – if extended to my research – amounting to a dismissal of the ethical standpoint which argues for complexity and reflexivity in our search for ethical ways of relating with social nature.

In my analysis, I have also steered away from relating the beliefs of my respondents in relation to the river with any particular spiritual and religious tradition. Firstly, both the Hindu and Muslim respondents shared the belief that the river had an agency and a will of her own. Secondly, their beliefs were mainly nurtured through oral tradition of stories passed down to them through their ancestors rather than any bookish learning. I have therefore sought to interpret their beliefs from the empirical perspective rather than as one that arose from any particular spiritual and religious tradition. For me, if anything, such common beliefs held by the Muslims as well as Hindus in my researched villages is an indicator of India's syncretic tradition.

As my above reflections have shown, I owe a particular debt to the subaltern scholarship (Guha 1988, Spivak 1988, Chakrabarty 2000, 2002, Chatterjee 1999, 2004) which has consistently tried to privilege peasant (read by me as the 'multilayered contextual local') interpretations and agency over other macro-economic-political interpretations of the social processes. That said, my research is also different from this subaltern body of theoretical work to the extent that it not only engages with the micro-multilayered local perspectives but that it also gives due attention to the macro processes and their effects on the micro reality. My research question, which espoused also a study of the state practices and institutionalisation of rights, had clear macro analytical relevance. The civil society in India, whose work I discuss in the chapter "In heterogeneous times: disaster response in post-colonial India" has questioned the statist formulations of rights through social movements and expanded the interpretations of constitutional rights in substantive terms through judicial reviews leading to significant social protection programmes such as NREGA or the reach of social safety programmes such as PDS or Pension schemes in the country. In other words, this institutionalization of constitutional rights through statist practices as well as civil society discourses has contributed to the space wherein subaltern discourse which contested with the governmentality of disaster rights in my researched village, could take shape.

My history chapter too remains a vital link in this macro-subaltern narrative that I seek to develop, for two reasons. Firstly, it shows how the colonial encounter has specifically instituted disaster rights in the form of a politics *of* rights and its contestation by subaltern politics. This is a process that continues to date in the form of contested disaster rights between the post colonial Indian state and civil society. Secondly, it provides the link

between the post colonial disaster response policies and programmes which borrow and draw from the colonial relief codes albeit in revised forms.

Similarly, I show in the chapter “Disasters, social change and politics for rights” that education, positive discrimination for the scheduled and other backward castes, and universal enfranchisement have contributed to the village politics, wherein the subaltern classes, namely the former untouchables, have found a critical voice. Thus, once again, I weave the macro-micro narrative to interpret the social processes.

The place of caste in Indian society has been a centre of enquiry within Indian scholarship. The impact of caste based positive discrimination on caste dynamics too has been central to the caste related debates in India. The significance of my empirical finding that the former untouchables were developing a critical voice and questioning their social domination therefore has to be located within this Indian scholarship. Within India, certain eminent social theorists such as Beteille (1990), Srinivas et al (1990) have suggested that positive discrimination in India has reified caste structures thus suggesting their regressive impact on the Indian polity and society (Beteille, 1990) (Srinivas, Shah & Bavaskar, 1990). Contrary to this assertion, Rajni Kothari and Nicholas Dirks have argued that caste in India has entered democratic politics via the affirmative action of the state based classifications of castes as ‘backward’ or ‘depressed’ or ‘scheduled’ (Kothari, 1990; Dirks, 2002).

My own empirical work has shown that scheduled and intermediate caste groups claim the equality of their caste groups by contesting the ‘superiority’ of the upper-caste groups. In other words, the caste system per se is not rejected but rather the ‘inferior’ value attached to their caste is questioned by the former untouchables. Thus equality or dignity rights are not demanded as individual members of the Indian polity but rather through a discourse of caste based equality. These empirical observations agree with Kaviraj who says that people have claimed “equality on the basis of caste, without giving up their caste identity” (Kaviraj, 2000 p109). Although a full discussion of these issues is beyond the scope of this research, the empirical observations in the thesis – namely the examples of the caste based contestations of the supremacy of the upper-caste by the scheduled and intermediate castes in my researched villages – can be taken as further indicators of the democratisation of Indian polity as currently taking place. Further, they also raise the question of what caste may mean in contemporary India and the way in which it is reproduced. From the subaltern perspective, caste, at the minimum, continues to be the associations of belongingness for

the former untouchables who paradoxically seek its erasure through its assertion. It also shows the paradoxical effects of positive discrimination on the Indian polity, namely the reinvention of a traditional institution such as caste in modern ways.

This finding also agrees with Frankel who has a more positive assessment of India's democratic politics arguing that democracy has struck deep chords amongst the masses by giving them an active voice in its making. Frankel argues that individual rights or universal suffrage has transformed the hierarchical social relations entrenched in traditional India (Frankel, 2000). More generally, the above link between macro-subaltern politics also shows the importance of the space for democratic politics in general in furthering empowerment of the socially excluded groups and its links with disaster recovery. In that sense, Sen's (1983) insight that links lack of democracy with the making of famines can be extended to disasters in general: that is, the important role that democratic politics can play in furthering social empowerment and disaster recovery.

My other theoretical debt goes to the scholarship which has engaged with the notions of moral economy (Scott, 1976). An important finding of this thesis is the way in which villagers in their ordinary lives construct the notion of rights as reciprocal obligations. Rights are constructed as reciprocal obligations, whether to their family or to their caste community, rather than as individual rights. Gender continues to be implicated in the way in which these rights are mobilised and contested in disaster contexts.

In the light of the above discussion, I thus ask, what do the different threads and findings arising in my empirical and theoretical chapters add up to in terms of the main narrative of this thesis? I take up this issue in the next subsection.

8.2 Building the larger picture and the main narrative: main finding and knowledge contribution of this thesis

I suggest that the main narrative built through all the chapters of the thesis is the way in which the discourse of disaster rights is played out, and indeed produced through its contestation amongst different stakeholders and players; namely state, civil society and the communities. In other words, '*politics*' is implicated in the disaster response, recovery and reduction practices and policies. Abstracts universal human rights are given substance through this politics and disaster rights are produced through the same. Having located this

as the main narrative of this thesis, I will now go on to outline the implications of this insight for progressive disaster theory and practice.

To recapitulate the aims of this thesis; this thesis has studied the production of rights in the context of floods in Uttar Pradesh, India, and examined the effect this has had on coping with disasters, and on disaster response and risk reduction. As discussed in the theoretical framework, the social vulnerability approach argues that political ideology and governance structures, shape public policies, and therefore the rights and entitlements of people which in turn affect vulnerability, resilience and disaster outcomes in any society. It also brings in a social order critique to argue that iniquitous social relations need to be transformed through an emancipatory agenda by making states accountable for the protection of disaster survivors and the mitigation of negative disaster impacts.

In the light of the thesis' main narrative, that disaster rights are given substance through politics, the main claim is that the emancipatory agenda proposed by the social vulnerability approach is served better if this production of rights is understood and assessed in critical ways. The thesis has therefore addressed this knowledge gap by setting for itself research questions that would enable a critical assessment of how rights are produced. The theoretical framework has developed an argument to show how such an enquiry into the research questions can be ethically conducted, by showing the structural limitations of human rights discourse, the importance of including notions of rights informed by the moral economy and subaltern discourse, and a critique of rights and their implications for disaster response and risk reduction strategies. The empirical chapters have addressed the research questions by grounding the claims made in the theoretical framework.

To sum up my overall argument, in the light of the main narrative of this thesis, that is, the fact of *politics* being implicated in disaster response, recovery, mitigation and adaptive strategies, I argue for the progressive politics *for* rights that emphasises subaltern voice and agency in disaster response, recovery and risk reduction processes. This is the main finding of this thesis.

In the next sub-section, I highlight the substance of such a progressive politics *for* rights in disasters by discussing the key findings from my theoretical and empirical chapters and its implications for the social vulnerability approach to disasters. The following can be considered my main recommendations for disaster theory and practice.

8.3 Towards a progressive politics for rights in disasters: some recommendations

8.3.1 Rights-based social vulnerability analysis needs to differentiate between a governmentality of rights and a progressive politics for rights in order to firmly align itself with the progressive politics for rights.

The foregoing chapters in this thesis have shown that governmentality as practices to control subaltern groups are also produced through rights discourses. Building upon the works of Arendt and Agamben, the theoretical framework has shown that the modern state organises constitutive inclusions and exclusions in the idea of human through rights discourses: thus producing a *homo sacer*, a bare life which is neither inside nor outside, that which is between *zoe* and *bios*. The different empirical chapters have shown how the *homo sacer* is produced in the context of disasters through a particular discourse on rights: that is, through disaster response policies, acts, and programmes of the Governments.

In the context of disasters, the historical chapter – namely “Rights and governmentality: famine responses in colonial India” – has shown how this *homo sacer* was produced by the colonial government through racial categories whilst institutionalizing famine response strategies through relief codes and poor houses. Further, a Malthusian approach dominated the colonial analysis of famine. Thus produced a governmentality of rights that treated this racial other as a subject to be disciplined and controlled and not as an equal to the colonizers in civil and political rights. This governmentality of rights, at the most, provided resources for ‘bare living’ and sometimes not even that – as in the case of experiments undertaken by Richard Temple or the famine deaths in colonial India.

In the post-colonial periods, as shown by the empirical chapter – “In heterogeneous times: disaster response in post colonial India” – the Indian government in response to disasters has institutionalized relief and recovery, social protection and safety network programmes such that only a bare living is maintained. Relief assistance, as well as that given through safety networks such as PDS, avert deaths on a mass scale or in famine-like situations but nevertheless are far from adequate to enable affected people a dignified recovery after disasters. Sections of population lived with hunger after the floods of 2007 and 2008 in UP. From the perspective of rights, this shows how a *homo sacer* as a person living between a state of well-being and bare living is produced by minimalist state interventions following disasters. Further, this chapter has also shown that while the constitutional provisions promote positive discriminations in the interest of marginalised groups, such as

scheduled castes and women, the state – in the way in which it delivers safety net and social protection programmes such as NREGA, or distributes land after erosion – actually perpetuates discriminatory practices. State practices often align with the ‘*jabar*’ or powerful people – who are politically as well as economically influential in the area – as seen through the way in which the governance over the *reta* lands eroded by the River Ghagra is organised. In this way, a governmentality of rights works through the collusion of governmental apparatuses with the local political economy processes.

My last empirical chapter “Disasters, social change and the politics for rights” which analyses the labour migration of flood and erosion-affected persons from the researched villages in UP – to Delhi, shows how the *homo sacer*, life of a migrant, without identity and rights, is produced by the apathetic Delhi elites and the Government. The migrant is here included in casual labour work but excluded from the civic society of Delhi.

Opposed to such a governmentality *of* rights is a progressive politics *for* rights based on subaltern resistance to this governmentality. Such a resistance questions the production of *homo sacer* and promotes an alternative discourse on disaster response and risk reduction practices.

The chapter titled “Rights and governmentality: famine responses in colonial India” shows that colonial governmentality was met by both nationalist and popular resistance supported by sympathisers from British parliamentarians. A radical critique of the racialised colonial discourses came from Gandhi who mobilised the subaltern classes to contest these discourses through the notion of *Swarajya* or self rule, where freedom from famine and other disasters was linked with the political, social, economic and cultural rights of colonized Indians. This mobilisation constituting the politics *for* rights promoted an alternative discourse on disaster response and risk reduction practices.

The empirical chapter, “In heterogeneous times: disaster response in post-colonial India” shows how the work of civil society groups in India has broadened the substantive content of rights – for example, on issues such as right to food – through a politics *for* rights. It also shows how a politics *for* rights by civil society groups has questioned the production of this *homo sacer* by seeking to expand the purview of the social protection and safety net programmes by the Indian Government. The chapter also shows that subaltern groups are aware of their entitlements and rights as well as their exclusion from the relief and developmental benefits meant for them. However, not wanting to get into a direct

confrontation with the dominant classes or government officials, due to their dependency on powerful persons or fear of social reprisals, they develop bargaining and negotiating strategies with influential or powerful persons and government officials in order to get some, if not all, the benefits. By developing active strategies to negotiate benefits which are anyway their right or entitlement, the subaltern groups display active agency on their part. In this way, they question their domination by practices of governmentality, thus forming a subaltern politics *for* rights.

Given the above discussion, social vulnerability analysis with its emancipatory emphasis, can benefit from a differentiation between a governmentality *of* rights and a politics *for* rights in disasters in order to firmly align itself with a politics *for* rights.

8.3.2 Rights-based humanitarian action cannot be neutral or impartial and needs to promote social justice and wellbeing of all rightless people through a politics *for* rights

The main narrative of this thesis is that *politics* is implicated in all aspects of disaster work. The question that remains is, given this reality, how should the humanitarian action conduct itself? The above differentiation between a governmentality *of* rights and a politics *for* rights in effect, calls for the need for humanitarian action to engage with a progressive politics for rights. This suggests therefore that the humanitarian code of conduct which emphasises neutrality, impartiality, needs to understand how rightlessness is produced in any disaster context and align itself with the substantive meanings attached to these principles in ways that further a universal idea of humanity. The chapter, “In heterogeneous times: disaster response in post colonial India”, shows how class, gender and caste intersect to produce disaster outcomes. These factors mediate the experience of power and powerlessness and the recovery of subaltern groups from disasters. Disaster risk reduction practices need to analyse and engage with these marginalisation processes if they are to build resilience and reduce social vulnerability in future disasters. In broader terms, it means humanitarian action needs to align with and promote the universal rights of all rightless, subaltern and socially excluded groups – that is migrants, women, refugees, stateless people – in disaster situations.

Humanitarian action informed by a politics *for* rights would also need to question the minimalist applications of human rights standard and call for the substantive widening of

human rights discourse beyond minimum standards in disasters to promote well-being as a holistic concept. In this sense, a politics *for* rights works in ways that promote a notion of social justice and well-being beyond rights.

It also calls for agents of social change, from international development organisations to local non-government organisations and social activists, to engage in a politics *for* rights that *believe* in the transformative potential of the subaltern politics and their agency. It suggests that the role of the vanguard in this transformative politics needs to be vested with the agency of subaltern groups who are already in the forefront of this politics in humanitarian situations.

8.3.3 A rights-based social vulnerability analysis, and a disaster response and risk reduction strategy need to give due attention to the effects of the moral economy, and the emerging notions of local entitlements and rights which are both enabling and disabling in building resilience to disasters.

The empirical chapters “In heterogeneous times: disaster response in post-colonial India” and “Disasters, social change and politics for rights” show both the enabling as well as disabling effects of the moral economy informed by local notions of entitlements and rights.

Informed by the moral economy, a local notion of entitlements, ‘*bhav-vyahaar*’, is one of the important strategies used by subaltern groups to cope with disasters. Reciprocity as obligated actions is the core sentiment behind the practices of *bhav-vyavhar*. These local entitlement practices minimize risks from extreme events, such as floods and erosion, and act as positive adaptive practices by subaltern groups and community members. The practice of *bhav-vyavhar* was also used by subaltern groups as a way to negotiate some benefits from the government, thus having an effect on how statist rights are produced. Further the practice of *bhav-vyavhar* was critical for the survival of the migrants in cities such as Delhi, where they came in search of work after flooding and erosion in the researched villages. These were the enabling effects of the moral economy and its consequent effects on local entitlements.

On the other hand, the chapters “In heterogeneous times: disaster response in post colonial India” and “Disasters, social change and politics for rights” also show that moral economy

informed by moralities and norms may promote notions of rights that are opposed to the well-being of some sections of the community. Thus gender and caste informed by shame may inhibit women's rights to work and therefore affect the reach and benefit of social protection programmes, such as NREGA to women. Thus state policies and acts meant to reduce disaster risks and enable recovery may be adversely affected by the moral economy with the effect that rights are produced in disabling ways for certain sections of the population.

Given that the moral economy informs moralities and localised notions of entitlements and rights, and plays a significant role in disaster coping, risk reduction and recovery in ways that are both enabling and disabling, a social vulnerability approach needs to deepen its analysis of vulnerability and resilience by extending its scope to include factors of moral economy and local entitlements.

8.3.4 A rights-based social vulnerability approach needs to treat disasters as discursive practices which represent a social re-order in the making, thus calling for an attention to the capacities and agency of the subaltern groups rather than their social vulnerability.

The empirical chapter "Disasters, social natures and the subaltern" discusses the production of social-natures and shows how subaltern groups develop their own critique of the local socio-political-economic processes and disaster risk reduction technical strategies by the Government. For example, a normative agency is given to the River Ghagra whereby the river erodes along with the land, the immoral accumulation of wealth. Such stories or public discourses provide a critique of the local political economy or of the patriarchal social relations representing the politics of subalterns, women and excluded groups. It therefore shows the capacities of subaltern groups for action. This chapter shows that disasters can act as discursive practices and be used to legitimize or question certain social claims. Thus, as discursive practices; social constructs of what constitute *legitimate* entitlements or rights are played out as resistant discourses of subaltern groups in and through disasters, as well as disaster risk reduction strategies. As occasions for social critiques, disasters represent a social re-order in the making: that is, of possible ways in which societies could change. The resistant critiques also show the capacities and agencies of the subaltern groups rather than their vulnerability.

8.3.5 Democratic liberal politics is a necessary space to further subaltern politics for rights. However, the subaltern modes of politics *for* rights may differ from modern individualised notions of equality rights. In the case of Bahraich, India, the subaltern politics represent group rights to equality that mobilise traditional associations such as caste. The social vulnerability approach needs to be alert to subaltern notions of rights that go beyond individualised notions of equality rights.

Democratic politics initiated through macro processes such as education, universal enfranchisement and political mobilisation which take into account vote bank politics at all levels (panchayat to state elections) have given a semblance of power to the former untouchables. This has had a profound effect on the way in which subaltern groups conduct their daily politics following the effects of disasters. The empirical chapter “Disasters, social change and politics for rights” shows how erosion and floods have contributed to social change processes by changing the social relations between castes and in particular the historical domination and subordination relationship which former untouchables and other intermediate castes had with the upper castes in the researched area. Loss of land due to erosion experienced by the upper castes, and migration strategies by the socially excluded groups and now also upper castes, have changed the socio-economic dependency of the untouchables on the upper castes. On one hand, the perceived symbolic capital of the former untouchables increased as they shared a social background with the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister who also belonged to a former untouchable caste; on the other hand, migration strategies which involved the upper castes in physical, casual labour work have led to a perceived lowering of their symbolic capital. This has led to social change processes which can be seen through the behaviour of former untouchables who transgressed certain codes of behaviour associated with perceived caste supremacy.

All this also suggests that this politics *for* rights by the subaltern groups is mobilised through group rights based on traditional associations such as ‘caste’ rather than through an emphasis on individual’s equality rights. This politics therefore reproduces caste in modern ways rather than withering it away as a tradition of the past, that is, contrary to liberal notions of individual equality rights.

8.3.6 A rights-based social vulnerability analysis needs to include an analysis of how social nature is produced and the way rights and rightlessness are produced through them.

The empirical chapter “Disasters, social nature and the subaltern” show how the experience of floods and erosion can be seen as a result of a complex social-nature habitat constituted through time by the adaptive strategies of human settlements affected by both the eroding nature of the meandering River Ghagra, and the changed socio-political landscape of new *reta* lands. Thus floods and erosion are conceptually better understood through the concept of social-nature as suggested by Castree and Braun (1998). This suggests that any social interventions that engage with disaster risks in those areas need to interrogate how the production of the social nature takes place, and their effects in terms of how and whom they benefit. Since the social formations in the *reta* area and the researched villages can be better understood through the prism of adaptive strategies, land struggles, migratory settlement histories of people, and the state interventions or non interventions, it calls for disaster risk reduction strategies that engage with the production of these social natures. They also resonate with Harvey (1996) who suggests that all places are produced through processes of ecological as well as social transformation which depict the historical geography of social struggles over resources.

8.3.7 A rights-based social vulnerability analysis needs to include a perspective on disasters and disaster risk reduction that foregrounds an association of humans and non-humans in order to build ethical futures

The chapter, “Disasters, social natures and the subaltern”, has shown the need to attend to Latour (2004a), and indeed the local and subaltern voice from the researched villages, which calls for a perspective on disasters that is built from an association of humans and non-humans. It therefore argues that neither social engineering, nor the technological engineering of nature is full answers to disasters: although both need to be assessed critically as a political ecology or social vulnerability paradigm suggests. The answers are rather to be sought through a reflexive search within the individual and within societies of people who reflexively interrogate the normative self-society-nature relationship and its contested nature.

8.3.8 A rights-based social vulnerability approach needs to be reflexive in its search for solutions and treat disaster risk reduction as a non-linear process to be achieved rather than a pre-given social strategy.

A reflexive search for ethical futures as emphasised through an association between human and non humans or between humans and humans need to take into account the multiple realities: namely the complexity of interactions between different actors; the government, subaltern groups (women and men), experts, NGOs, that is all those who claim to representing social nature. Indeed, the multiple normative standards evoked by these different social actors suggest that advocacy models proposing disaster risk reduction strategies in any disaster need to be far more reflexive about the effects of their practices, and about the conscious or unconscious alliances they may be making with these different social actors. Under the circumstances, social vulnerability approaches need to treat disaster risk reduction as a non-linear process to be achieved rather than a pre-given social strategy. This suggests that local contextual complexities and normative understandings will have to be built into the disaster risk reduction strategy.

8.3.9 A rights-based disaster response and risk reduction needs to be linked with other development goals: such as the right to development, the right to education, the right to health, the right to food and livelihoods and the right to information. Thus these development rights need to be strengthened to make the community more resilient.

As noted in the empirical chapters, going beyond a minimalist interpretation of rights in disasters, calls for a politics *for* rights that puts a deeper developmental agenda in place. Thus wider strategy to deal with poverty, impoverishment, and the resulting food scarcities after disasters is needed. Civil Society groups in India have attempted to broaden and deepen this developmental agenda by pressurising the state to bring in a right to education, a right to livelihood, a right to health, and a right to food within the ambit of state response, while attempting (with a measure of success) to make the state itself more transparent and accountable through campaigns such as the right to Information and the social audit. Such rights-based initiatives need to be strengthened at local levels.

Kaviraj (2000) also argues that the symbolic assertion of marginalised groups may give them greater prestige, but without the improvement of structural access of these groups to literacy, health, income, capital, and other social benefits; inequalities will be reproduced.

The empirical observations in this thesis agree with this general observation by Kaviraj and emphasises the need to reach such substantive development goals as a part of a disaster risk reduction strategy and programme.

8.3.10 Rights-based social vulnerability approach needs to treat rural-urban as a continuum with a focus on rights of migrants.

The chapter, “Disasters, social change and the politics for rights”, shows the importance of the rural-urban linkage through migration to the coping and recovery strategies. This thesis shows that urban-rural linkages and migration are not peripheral but rather *central* to disaster coping and recovery processes. To that extent, the thesis suggests that disaster risk reduction and recovery strategies engage with rural-urban processes as a continuum with a specific focus on the rights of the migrants. This can be a research agenda for the future.

Having formulated the above 10 point progressive politics *for* rights to inform the disaster theory and practice and in particular the social vulnerability approach; I highlight the knowledge contribution to research methods as well as some methodological limitations. Lastly, I outline the contribution to the MICRODIS project.

8.4 Outlining the contributions to research methods and acknowledging some limitations

The thesis has adopted a double hermeneutic methodology. This thesis has shown how an enquiry into a dynamic interaction between the local precepts and constructs of rights and sociological constructs of rights can be conducted by the use of ethnographic research methods. More importantly, the thesis has shown that these interactions are complex, given the multilayered nature of the local. Thus uncovering the otherwise excluded perspectives of the subaltern requires painstaking field work and continued critical reflexive enquiry beyond fieldwork into the thesis writing process. All research methods and participatory research methods in particular could learn from this insight and could ask not only the question ‘whose reality counts’ but also ‘how can subaltern reality count’? This is the main contribution of the thesis towards research methods.

In terms of its methodological limitations, I remain deeply aware of the theoretical and interpretive choices I have made at every step of the entire research process. The findings

of this research therefore remain vulnerable to my own biases and my standpoint. It therefore will remain vulnerable to charges from opposing sides. On one hand, those academics who may not share my interpretive choices may question my findings. On the other, my own respondents whose beliefs I do not share (such as those concerning caste and the river's agency) may also question them.

8.5 Contribution to the MICRODIS project

This research enquiry was closely allied with the MICRODIS project which had adopted the social vulnerability conceptual framework as its starting point of enquiry into the social impacts of disasters. The thesis has unpacked the notion of 'rights', one of the conceptual categories identified by the MICRODIS social vulnerability framework.

Further, as a part of the commitment by the MICRODIS consortium, I have also visited Bahraich district in January 2011 to share my empirical insights with the various stakeholders including the senior government officials I had interacted with during my earlier field work. In my meetings with these government officials I shared the problems arising out of the local political economy processes, government actions or inactions on the disaster recovery of my respondents, the current minimal support of the government and the need to improve them so as to improve people's resilience to cope with disasters. Alongside, I have also emphasised subaltern agency, their capacities and the need to listen to and include their voices in disaster response, recovery and risk reduction strategies planned by the government. I therefore hope that this research project has contributed to the MICRODIS objective of knowledge sharing to improve the understanding about disasters and through that, the resilience building of the disaster affected persons.

8.6 Summing up the thesis

To sum up, this thesis has argued that politics is implicated in all disaster work and thus calls for a progressive politics *for* rights in disasters. It calls for the inclusion of a critical assessment of rights which furthers subaltern politics in the social vulnerability approach to disasters. To undertake such an assessment, this thesis has posed certain research questions and has sought to answer them as follows:

- The statist notions of rights or human rights discourses influence the way coping, recovery and risk reduction is undertaken by the state after disasters. Although used as minimum standards of wellbeing and recovery by the state for its post disaster

recovery programmes, they nevertheless act as a minimalist safety net for the disaster affected persons. These statist notions of rights also sometimes align with local powers associated with caste, class and gender leading to iniquitous impacts. There is thus a need to approach and analyse the statist notions of rights critically in any disaster context.

- The moral economy plays an important role in the way in which coping and recovery is enabled or disabled. As normative practices, they influence the way women and men from different social groups (caste, class) use differential coping and recovery strategies, which affect their wellbeing. The subaltern construct of rights plays a subversive and a discursive role in the perception of disasters and challenges the dominant ways in which disaster risk reduction is undertaken. It emphasises the need for reflexivity and to treat disaster risk reduction as a complex process which is committed to the building of an ethical future: namely by affirming ethical relations between humans-humans and humans-nature.
- Moral economy influences the way statist programmes are undertaken. Similarly, the subaltern critique of rights questions the way statist notions of rights are played out, often marginalising the wellbeing of socially excluded groups affected by disasters. It also challenges the politics *of* rights played out in and through disaster and development policies and keeps the politics *for* rights alive in its search for an inclusive, equitable and just society.

To sum up, these insights form the complex terrain of politics through which rights are produced in disasters. They assert the need to integrate progressive politics for rights in disaster theory and practice.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

Antodaya: A government scheme which gives highly subsidized food items to most vulnerable persons in the villages

Baadh: Major floods

Bandha: Belha Behroli Embankment

Bichuinya: middleman

CRF: Calamity Relief Funds

DU: Delhi University

Dalits: a term used in India for the former untouchables

EU: European Union

Gram Panchayat: Gram panchayats are the lowest tier of elected body in India and have elected village level representatives.

Harijans: It means children of god and is a name coined by Mahatma Gandhi for the former untouchables to remove the stigma attached with their caste names

ICRC: International Committee for Red Cross

ICID: International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage

Kataan: Erosion by River Ghagra

MDG: Millenium Development Goals

NCCF: National Calamity Contingency Fund

NDMA: National Disaster Management Act

NREGA: National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

NGO: Non Government Organisation

OBC: Other Backward Castes and those belonging to intermediate castes

Pradhan: Elected village head of the gram panchayat

Pattidari: Kinship relations arising from males

Pataan: Deposition by the River Ghagra

Purviyas: Those people who have come from others parts of Uttar Pradesh and are now staying in reta areas of the River Ghagra.

PDS: Public Distribution System locally also known as a ‘ration shop’

Reta: Areas which are in danger of constant erosion and deposition by the River Ghagra.

Rishtedari: Kinship relations arising from females

S C: Scheduled Castes or former untouchables

Sailaab: Major floods

Tehsildar: a Revenue officer in charge of a Tehsil

UP: Uttar Pradesh

UNISDR: United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

UN: United Nations

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Veranda: outer courtyard of the houses in the researched villages

In this paragraph, I have written about one of the important incidents of the day: the narration of one of my respondents about the badnaami or loss of respect faced by the household in women's out migration.

Here I note that I need to further investigate how

This word namely badnaami means a loss of respect. Here

In this paragraph, I have written about one of the important incidents of the day: the narration of one of my respondents about the *badnaami* or loss of respect faced by the household in women's out migration.

Here I note that I need to further investigate how *badnaami* influences caste, gender, work, migration and rights, in the context of the effects of floods and erosion. This is one of the theoretical memos.

This word namely *badnaami* means a loss of respect. Here I note that *badnaami* has been one of the recurrent themes in the field work. This is one of the theoretical memos.

Appendix 3: Extract of the transcript of the interview with Jumna, one of the key informants

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Figure 1: A diagram showing a horizontal line with a vertical line segment attached to it, forming a T-shape. The vertical segment is labeled '1' and the horizontal segment is labeled '2'.

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Appendix 3 continued:

Translation of the extract of the transcript of the interview with Jumna, one of the key informants

SA: So where do they [children] go to school?

Jumna: Raja Baundi

SA: How do they go?

Jumna: walking

SA: Can you tell me about any other difficulties faced by you?

Jumna: What more can I tell you? Our situation is full of difficulty, [pause] illness, all start with this; when we don't have food in the house; don't have any land left; don't have a house, then how can the earnings from daily labour be enough to support us? We earn Rs 50-60 [a little more than one dollar]. What can we do in that amount? It is not even enough to buy masala [condiments] these days.

[coded as: consq-kat]

SA: Were you not doing *mazdoori* [daily labour] earlier [before erosion] also?

Jumna: yes

SA: so is there any difference in the *mazdoori* during then and now?

Jumna: Yes, there is a big difference between the *mazdoori* done then and now. The main difference is that – earlier – we use to do *mazdoori* during a season [that is for some days during agricultural season] and then lived on it for a year or so. But now we have to go for *mazdoori* everyday [before erosion, Jumna had a diverse livelihood, as she also grew her own crops on land now under erosion]. If we get daily work, then we are able to eat in the evening. But if we don't get *mazdoori*, then we just have to sleep without it.

[coded as: consq-kat-work]

SA: So are there days when there is no food to eat?

Jumna: yes, there are such days when you don't get food in the morning or in the evening.

[coded as: cons-kat-food]

Appendix 4: Details of respondents and other key stake-holder interviewees

Details of respondents: Includes 19 key informants and another 45 persons who gave disaster narratives

Sr. No	Name of respondent	Sex	Age	Religion/Caste	Caste Group/Govt designated social category
1	Sonadevi	F	55	Kurmi	Intermediate caste/OBC
2	Seema	F	30	Phasi	Scheduled caste
3	Lalu	M	50	Thakur	Upper caste
4	Shyam	M	55	Gudiya	Intermediate caste/OBC
5	Raghu	M	35	Phasi	Scheduled caste
6	Medha	F	60	Chamar	Scheduled caste
7	Noorjahan	F	35	Muslim	Other backward class(OBC)
8	Laxman	M	36	Phasi	Scheduled caste
9	Narayan	M	38	Gudiya	Intermediate caste/OBC
10	Rukma	F	50	Chamar	Scheduled caste
11	Savitri	F	45	Luniya	Intermediate caste/OBC
12	Sonpatta	F	40	Chamar	Scheduled caste
13	Kamaladevi	F	70	Phasi	Scheduled caste
14	Bala	F	45	Gudiya	Intermediate caste/OBC
15	Suryakala	F	55	Gudiya	Intermediate caste/OBC
16	Janaki	F	65	Chamar	Scheduled caste
17	Hari	M	50	Chamar	Scheduled caste
18	Mala	F	35	Luniya	Intermediate caste/OBC
19	Laxmi	F	60	Kurmi	Intermediate caste/OBC
20	Jumna	F	45	Muslim	Other backward class (OBC)
21	Chand	M	35	Gudiya	Intermediate caste/OBC
22	Ramesh	M	30	Gudiya	Intermediate caste/OBC

23	Surat	M	80	Thakur	Upper caste
24	Prasad	M	70	Thakur	Upper caste
25	Sidhuchacha	M	85	Muslim	Other backward class (OBC)
26	Ambar	M	96	Vaishya	Intermediate caste
27	Jairam	M	60	Thakur	Upper caste
28	Rita	F	32	Thakur	Upper caste
29	Ramani	F	45	Brahman	Upper caste
30	Naman	M	70	Thakur	Upper caste
31	Zubeida	F	75	Muslim	Other backward class/OBC
32	Abhijit	M	55	Thakur	Upper caste
33	Rajesh	M	30	Gudiya	Intermediate caste/OBC
34	Mahesh	M	30	Chamar	Scheduled caste
35	Vishal	M	75	Lodh	Intermediate caste/OBC
36	Lata	F	36	Thakur	Upper caste
37	Chetansingh	M	34	Thakur	Upper caste
38	Dev	M	25	Ahir	Intermediate caste/OBC
39	Rubar	M	65	Brahman	Upper caste
40	Abid	M	45	Muslim	Other backward classes(OBC)
41	Khila	M	32	Teli	Intermediate caste/OBC
42	Virsingh	M	40	Thakur	Upper caste
43	Purvi	F	38	Thakur	Upper caste
44	Rajani	F	60	Thakur	Upper caste
45	Ujwala	F	36	Thakur	Upper caste
46	Manasram	M	28	Gudiya	Intermediate caste/OBC
47	Someshsingh	M	30	Thakur	Upper caste
48	Bhawani	M	30	Chamar	Scheduled caste

49	Puram	M	35	Chamar	Scheduled caste
50	Mohit	M	22	Gudiya	Intermediate caste/OBC
51	Dildar	M	32	Kurmi	Intermediate caste/OBC
52	Akash	M	30	Thakur	Upper caste
53	Natharam	M	70	Chamar	Scheduled caste
54	Vimla	F	65	Chamar	Scheduled caste
55	Nita	F	28	Brahman	Upper caste
56	Meena	F	30	Gudiya	Intermediate caste/OBC
57	Fatima	F	32	Muslim	Other backward class(OBC)
58	Rama	F	60	Ahir	Intermediate caste/OBC
59	Raman	M	35	Brahman	Upper caste
60	Sharda	F	30	Luniya	Intermediate/OBC
61	Shabnam	F	50	Muslim	Other backward class(OBC)
62	Mani	F	27	Phasi	Scheduled caste
63	Parvati	F	55	Thakur	Upper caste
64	Soni	F	25	Phasi	Scheduled caste

Total respondents by sex, caste and religion:

Total male: 33

Total female: 31

Total Intermediate caste and 'other backward classes' (OBC): 28

Total Scheduled caste: 16

Total Upper caste: 20

Total Muslims: 7

Total Hindus: 57

Of these respondents, 58 are residents of Ghagrapur whilst 6 others are originally from either Baundi, Laxmanpur or Mithapur. Out of these six respondents, four were living in the vicinity of the village Ghagrapur on the Belha-Behroli embankment as they were displaced due to erosion by Ghagra. Other two respondents were persons from Baundi and especially contacted for their knowledge about the history of the floods, erosion and relief practices in this area.

II) Interviews with other key stake-holders in Uttar Pradesh include:

1. State Relief Commissioner, Lucknow

2. Additional District Magistrate, Mahsi
3. R P Verma Tehsildar, Mahsi
4. D C Verma, District Engineer in charge of Bahraich subdivisional office, Bahraich
5. R P Singh, District Engineer with Bahraich subdivisional office, Bahriach
6. Attarsingh, Head of irrigation and flood control for UP state, Lucknow
7. Munnalal, Engineer with irrigation and flood control, UP
8. Virendra Pandey, UNDP-Government in charge of coordination for disaster response in Bahraich
9. R Chandra, BDO, Fakharpur block, Fakharpur
10. Dhruv kumar, Director of Panchasheet Trust, Bahraich
11. Vishaal, Panchasheel Trust, Bahraich
12. Ramnaresh, Panchasheel Trust, Bahraich
13. Sanjay Awasthi, Bhartiya Gram Udyog Seva Sansthan, Bahraich
14. Pradhans of village Ghagrapur, Mithapur, Laxmanpur and Baundi

Appendix 5: MICRODIS Data sets considered in the thesis

This includes the data collected on 1st October – 15th October 2008 by the India MICRODIS team, on Bahraich site. I too participated in this entire data collection process. The following collected data was considered in the thesis:

I) Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions (FGD) were held with following groups:

- FGD with women of upper caste
- FGD with women of scheduled and intermediate castes
- FGD with men of all castes
- FGD with pradhans
- FGD with NGOs

II) Interviews with stakeholders:

- Sudhir kumar Srivastava, Collector Bahraich
- R P Verma, Tehsildar Mahsi
- Virendra Pandey, UNDP-Government in charge of coordination of disaster response in Bahraich
- P K Jain, SDM, Mahsi
- Arun Kumar Verma, Additional Development Officer
- Additional District Magistrate, Mahsi

III) Survey in 4 flooded villages

List of all the households were collected from the pradhans (village heads) of Ghagrapur, Laxmanpur, Mithapur and Baundi. The total numbers of households in these four villages were 2064. A random list of households was drawn from this total population by the use of a computer programme. Each household was then contacted by the enumerators for an interview. In this way, in all 312 interviews were gathered from these four flooded villages.

Source: University of Delhi, 2009

Appendix 6: Description of caste, its traditional work and the socio-economic status

S. No	Caste	Description of Caste
1	Thakur	Thakurs are one of the uppercaste groups in the village. They claim that their traditional work is that of that of warriors and have traditionally been a part of the local rulers in the area. They have been traditional landholders in the area. Today most of the thakurs are engaged in agricultural work.
2	Brahman	Brahmans is one of the upper caste groups in the village. Today, the work done by brahmans is diversified. While some are still engaged in the traditional priestly work and perform religious ceremonies for different households in the area; others are engaged in agricultural work. They too are the traditional landholders in the area.
3	Chamar	Chamars is one of the former untouchable groups in the village. They were traditionally engaged in removal of dead carcass of the animals in the village and did most of the menial duties for other caste groups. Historically speaking they were one of the landless groups in the village and faced social stigma. It is one of the scheduled castes.
4	Phasi	Phasis is one of the former untouchable groups in the village. They were traditionally involved in the menial duties in the village. The main occupation of the phasi women is cutting the umbilical cord of the new born babies, which is considered to be a 'dirty' work locally. Phasi women also massage the new born babies and the mothers. Historically speaking, they too were one of the landless groups in the village and faced social stigma. It is one of the scheduled castes.
5	Luniya	Luniya's traditional work was that of making salt or the ' <i>lun</i> '. However none of the households are engaged in this work today. They are currently involved in agricultural work in the village. Historically, they too are one of the landless groups in the village. It is one of the intermediate castes and is designated as 'other backward class' (OBC).
6	Kurmi	Kurmi's traditional work in the village has been that of agriculture. It is one of the intermediate castes and is designated as 'other backward class' (OBC)
7	Gudiya/Kevaths	Gudiya or Kevaths are traditionally involved in boat rowing or fishing work. They also acted as servants in the upper caste households. Historically, they too are one of the landless groups in the village. It is one of the intermediate castes and is designated as 'other backward class' (OBC).
8	Teli	Telis were traditionally involved in oil milling in the village. However with the mechanisation of oil milling, the telis are currently involved in agricultural work. It is one of the intermediate castes and is designated as 'other backward class' (OBC).
9	Nhai	Nhai's acted as the village barbers and also had duties during certain religious ceremonies which needed shaving of the head

		in the village. It is an intermediate caste and is designated as 'other backward class' (OBC).
10	Ahirs	They have traditionally been herders of livestock and their main occupation has been that of rearing and sale of cattle and milk. It is an intermediate caste and is designated as 'other backward class' (OBC).
11	Lodhs	They have traditionally been involved in agricultural labour in the village. It is an intermediate caste and is designated as 'other backward class' (OBC).

Appendix 7

MICRODIS PROJECT

www.microdis-eu.be

MICRODIS is an integrated project funded under the European Commission's Sixth Framework Programme – Thematic Priority 6.3 Global Change and Ecosystems (contract number GOCE-CT-2007-036877).

The overall goal of MICRODIS is to strengthen preparedness, mitigation and prevention strategies in order to reduce the health, social and economic impacts of extreme events on communities. The researched areas include three extreme events, namely floods, earthquakes, and windstorms, in the context of Europe and Asia.

The broad objectives of the MICRODIS project are as follows:

- To strengthen the scientific and empirical foundation of the relationship between extreme events and their health, social and economic impacts
- To develop and integrate concepts, methods, tools, and databases towards a common global approach
- To improve human resources and coping capacity in Asia and Europe through training and knowledge sharing

The MICRODIS consortium consists of 10 leading academic and policy expert institutions from across Europe and Asia.

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Disclaimer: This PhD reflects only the author's views and that the European Commission or the Community is not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

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